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TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

VOL. II.



THE WORKS OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

Twenty Years After

In Two Volumes
Volume II



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TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BEGGAR OF ST. EUSTACHE.

D'ARTAGNAN had calculated that in not going at once to the Palais Royal he would give Comminges time to arrive before him, and consequently to make the cardinal acquainted with the eminent services which he, D'Artagnan, and his friend had rendered to the queen's party in the morning.

They were indeed admirably received by Mazarin, who paid them numerous compliments and announced that they were more than half on their way to obtain what they desired, namely, D'Artagnan his captaincy, Porthos his barony.

D'Artagnan would have preferred money in hand to all that fine talk, for he knew well that to Mazarin it was easy to promise and hard to perform. But, though he held the cardinal's promises as of little worth, he affected to be completely satisfied, for he was unwilling to discourage Porthos.

Whilst the two friends were with the cardinal, the queen sent for him. Mazarin, thinking that it would be the means of increasing the zeal of his two defenders if he procured them personal thanks from the queen, motioned them to follow him. D'Artagnan and Porthos pointed to their dusty and torn dresses, but the cardinal shook his head.

"Those costumes," he said, "are of more worth than most of those which you will see on the backs of the queen's courtiers; they are costumes of battle."

D'Artagnan and Porthos obeyed. The court of Anne of

Austria was full of gayety and animation ; for, after having gained a victory over the Spaniard, it had just gained another over the people. Broussel had been conducted out of Paris without further resistance and was at this time in the prison of Saint Germain ; while Blancmesnil, who was arrested at the same time, but whose arrest had been made without difficulty or noise, was safe in the Castle of Vincennes.

Comminges was near the queen, who was questioning him upon the details of his expedition, and every one was listening to his account, when D'Artagnan and Porthos were perceived at the door, behind the cardinal.

"Ah, madame," said Comminges, hastening to D'Artagnan, "here is one who can tell you better than myself, for he was my protector. Without him I should probably at this moment be a dead fish in the nets at Saint Cloud, for it was a question of nothing less than throwing me into the river. Speak, D'Artagnan, speak."

D'Artagnan had been a hundred times in the same room with the queen since he had become lieutenant of the musketeers, but her majesty had never once spoken to him.

"Well, sir," at last said Anne of Austria, "you are silent, after rendering such a service ?"

"Madame," replied D'Artagnan, "I have nought to say, save that my life is ever at your majesty's service, and that I shall only be happy the day I lose it for you."

"I know that, sir ; I have known that," said the queen, "a long time ; therefore I am delighted to be able thus publicly to mark my gratitude and my esteem."

"Permit me, madame," said D'Artagnan, "to reserve a portion for my friend ; like myself" (he laid an emphasis on these words) "an ancient musketeer of the company of Treville ; he has done wonders."

"His name ?" asked the queen.

"In the regiment," said D'Artagnan, "he is called Porthos" (the queen started), "but his true name is the Chevalier du Vallon."

"De Bracieux de Pierrefonds," added Porthos.

"These names are too numerous for me to remember them all, and I will content myself with the first," said the queen, graciously. Porthos bowed. At this moment the coadjutor was announced; a cry of surprise ran through the royal assemblage. Although the coadjutor had preached that same morning it was well known that he leaned much to the side of the Fronde; and Mazarin, in requesting the archbishop of Paris to make his nephew preach, had evidently had the intention of administering to Monsieur de Retz one of those Italian kicks he so much enjoyed giving.

The fact was, in leaving Notre Dame the coadjutor had learned the event of the day. Although almost engaged to the leaders of the Fronde he had not gone so far but that retreat was possible should the court offer him the advantages for which he was ambitious and to which the coadjutorship was but a stepping-stone. Monsieur de Retz wished to become archbishop in his uncle's place, and cardinal, like Mazarin; and the popular party could with difficulty accord him favors so entirely royal. He therefore hastened to the palace to congratulate the queen on the battle of Lens, determined beforehand to act with or against the court, as his congratulations were well or ill received.

The coadjutor possessed, perhaps, as much wit as all those put together who were assembled at the court to laugh at him. His speech, therefore, was so well turned, that in spite of the great wish felt by the courtiers to laugh, they could find no point on which to vent their ridicule. He concluded by saying that he placed his feeble influence at her majesty's command.

During the whole time he was speaking, the queen appeared to be well pleased with the coadjutor's harangue; but terminating as it did with such a phrase, the only one which could be caught at by the jokers, Anne turned around and directed a glance toward her favorites, which announced that she delivered up the coadjutor to their tender mercies. Immediately the wits of the court plunged into satire.

Nogent-Beautin, the fool of the court, exclaimed that "the queen was very happy to have the succor of religion at such a moment." This caused a universal burst of laughter. The Count de Villeroy said that "he did not know how any fear could be entertained for a moment, when the court had, to defend itself against the parliament and the citizens of Paris, his holiness the coadjutor, who by a signal could raise an army of curates, church porters and vergers."

The Maréchal de la Meilleraie added that in case the coadjutor should appear on the field of battle it would be a pity that he should not be distinguished in the mêlée by wearing a red hat, as Henry IV. had been distinguished by his white plume at the battle of Ivry.

During this storm, Gondy, who had it in his power to make it most unpleasant for the jesters, remained calm and stern. The queen at last asked him if he had anything to add to the fine discourse he had just made to her.

"Yes, madame," replied the coadjutor; "I have to beg you to reflect twice ere you cause a civil war in the kingdom."

The queen turned her back and the laughing recommenced.

The coadjutor bowed and left the palace, casting upon the cardinal such a glance as is best understood by mortal foes. That glance was so sharp that it penetrated the heart of Mazarin, who, reading in it a declaration of war, seized D'Artagnan by the arm and said:

"If occasion requires, monsieur, you will remember that man who has just gone out, will you not?"

"Yes, my lord," he replied. Then, turning toward Porthos, "The devil!" said he, "this has a bad look. I dislike these quarrels among men of the church."

Gondy withdrew, distributing benedictions on his way and finding a malicious satisfaction in causing the adherents of his foes to prostrate themselves at his feet.

"Oh!" he murmured, as he left the threshold of the palace: "Ungrateful court! faithless court! cowardly court! I will teach you how to laugh to-morrow — but in another manner."

But whilst they were indulging in extravagant joy at the Palais Royal, to increase the hilarity of the queen, Mazarin, a man of sense and whose fear, moreover, gave him foresight, lost no time in making idle and dangerous jokes; he went out after the coadjutor, settled his account, locked up his gold, and had confidential workmen to contrive hiding places in his walls.

On his return home the coadjutor was informed that a young man had come in after his departure and was waiting for him; he started with delight when, on demanding the name of this young man, he learned that it was Louvières. He hastened to his cabinet. Broussel's son was there, still furious, and still bearing bloody marks of his struggle with the king's officers. The only precaution he had taken in coming to the archbishopric was to leave his arquebuse in the hands of a friend.

The coadjutor went to him and held out his hand. The young man gazed at him as if he would have read the secret of his heart.

"My dear Monsieur Louvières," said the coadjutor, "believe me, I am truly concerned for the misfortune which has happened to you."

"Is that true and do you speak seriously?" asked Louvières.

"From the depth of my heart," said Gondy.

"In that case, my lord, the time for words has passed and the hour for action is at hand; my lord, in three days, if you wish it, my father will be out of prison and in six months you may be cardinal."

The coadjutor started.

"Oh! let us speak frankly," continued Louvières, "and act in a straightforward manner. Thirty thousand crowns in alms is not given, as you have done for the last six months, out of pure Christian charity; that would be too grand. You are ambitious — it is natural; you are a man of genius and you know your worth. As for me, I hate the court and have but one desire at this moment — vengeance. Give us the

clergy and the people, of whom you can dispose, and I will bring you the citizens and the parliament; with these four elements Paris is ours in a week; and believe me, monsieur coadjutor, the court will give from fear what it will not give from good-will."

It was now the coadjutor's turn to fix his piercing eyes on Louvières.

"But, Monsieur Louvières, are you aware that it is simply civil war you are proposing to me?"

"You have been preparing long enough, my lord, for it to be welcome to you now."

"Never mind," said the coadjutor; "you must be well aware that this requires reflection."

"And how many hours of reflection do you ask?"

"Twelve hours, sir; is it too long?"

"It is now noon; at midnight I will be at your house."

"If I should not be in, wait for me."

"Good! at midnight, my lord."

"At midnight, my dear Monsieur Louvières."

When once more alone Gondy sent to summon all the curates with whom he had any connection to his house. Two hours later, thirty officiating ministers from the most populous, and consequently the most disturbed parishes of Paris had assembled there. Gondy related to them the insults he had received at the Palais Royal and retailed the jests of Beautin, the Count de Villeroy, and Maréchal de la Meilleraie. The curates asked him what was to be done.

"Simply this," said the coadjutor: "You are the directors of all consciences. Well, undermine in them the miserable prejudice of respect and fear of kings; teach your flocks that the queen is a tyrant; and repeat often and loudly, so that all may know it, that the misfortunes of France are caused by Mazarin, her lover and her destroyer; begin this work to-day, this instant even, and in three days I shall expect the result. For the rest, if any one of you have further or better counsel to expound, I will listen to him with the greatest pleasure."

Three curates remained — those of St. Merri, St. Sulpice and St. Eustache. The others withdrew.

“You think, then, that you can help me more efficaciously than your brothers?” said Gondy.

“We hope so,” answered the curates.

“Let us hear. Monsieur de St. Merri, you begin.”

“My lord, I have in my parish a man who might be of the greatest use to you.”

“Who and what is this man?”

“A shopkeeper in the Rue des Lombards, who has great influence upon the commerce of his quarter.”

“What is his name?”

“He is named Planchet, who himself also caused a rising about six weeks ago; but as he was searched for after this *émeute* he disappeared.”

“And can you find him?”

“I hope so. I think he has not been arrested and as I am his wife’s confessor, if *she* knows where he is I shall know it too.”

“Very well, sir; find this man and when you have found him bring him to me.”

“We will be with you at six o’clock, my lord.”

“Go, my dear curate, and may God assist you!”

“And you, sir?” continued Gondy, turning to the curate of St. Sulpice.

“I, my lord,” said the latter, “I know a man who has rendered great services to a very popular prince and who would make an excellent leader of revolt. Him I can place at your disposal; it is Count de Rochefort.”

“I know him also, but unfortunately he is not in Paris.”

“My lord, he has been for three days at the Rue Cassette.”

“And wherefore has he not been to see me?”

“He was told — my lord will pardon me —”

“Certainly, speak.”

“That your lordship was about to treat with the court.”

Gondy bit his lips.

“They are mistaken; bring him here at eight o’clock, sir, and may Heaven bless you as I bless you!”

"And now 'tis your turn," said the coadjutor, turning to the last that remained; "have you anything as good to offer me as the two gentlemen who have left us?"

"Better, my lord."

"*Diable!* think what a solemn engagement you are making; one has offered a wealthy shopkeeper, the other a count; you are going, then, to offer a prince, are you?"

"I offer you a beggar, my lord."

"Ah! ah!" said Gondy, reflecting, "you are right, sir; some one who could raise the legion of paupers who choke up the crossings of Paris; some one who would know how to cry aloud to them, that all France might hear it, that it is Mazarin who has reduced them to poverty."

"Exactly your man."

"Bravo! and the man?"

"A plain and simple beggar, as I have said, my lord, who asks for alms, as he gives holy water; a practice he has carried on for six years on the steps of St. Eustache."

"And you say that he has a great influence over his compereers?"

"Are you aware, my lord, that mendicity is an organized body, a kind of association of those who have nothing against those who have everything; an association in which every one takes his share; one that elects a leader?"

"Yes, I have heard it said," replied the coadjutor.

"Well, the man whom I offer you is a general syndic."

"And what do you know of him?"

"Nothing, my lord, except that he is tormented with remorse."

"What makes you think so?"

"On the twenty-eighth of every month he makes me say a mass for the repose of the soul of one who died a violent death; yesterday I said this mass again."

"And his name?"

"Maillard; but I do not think it is his right one."

"And think you that we should find him at this hour at his post?"

"Certainly."

"Let us go and see your beggar, sir, and if he is such as you describe him, you are right—it will be you who have discovered the true treasure."

Gondy dressed himself as an officer, put on a felt cap with a red feather, hung on a long sword, buckled spurs to his boots, wrapped himself in an ample cloak and followed the curate.

The coadjutor and his companion passed through all the streets lying between the archbishopric and the St. Eustache Church, watching carefully to ascertain the popular feeling. The people were in an excited mood, but, like a swarm of frightened bees, seemed not to know at what point to concentrate; and it was very evident that if leaders of the people were not provided all this agitation would pass off in idle buzzing.

On arriving at the Rue des Prouvaires, the curate pointed toward the square before the church.

"Stop!" he said, "there he is at his post."

Gondy looked at the spot indicated and perceived a beggar seated in a chair and leaning against one of the moldings; a little basin was near him and he held a holy water brush in his hand.

"Is it by permission that he remains there?" asked Gondy.

"No, my lord; these places are bought. I believe this man paid his predecessor a hundred pistoles for his."

"The rascal is rich, then?"

"Some of those men sometimes die worth twenty thousand and twenty-five and thirty thousand francs and sometimes more."

"Hum!" said Gondy, laughing; "I was not aware my alms were so well invested."

In the meantime they were advancing toward the square and the moment the coadjutor and the curate put their feet on the first church step the mendicant arose and proffered his brush.

He was a man between sixty-six and sixty-eight years of age, little, rather stout, with gray hair and light eyes. His countenance denoted the struggle between two opposite principles—a wicked nature, subdued by determination, perhaps by repentance.

He started on seeing the cavalier with the curate. The latter and the coadjutor touched the brush with the tips of their fingers and made the sign of the cross; the coadjutor threw a piece of money into the hat, which was on the ground.

“Maillard,” began the curate, “this gentleman and I have come to talk with you a little.”

“With me!” said the mendicant; “it is a great honor for a poor distributor of holy water.”

There was an ironical tone in his voice which he could not quite disguise and which astonished the coadjutor.

“Yes,” continued the curate, apparently accustomed to this tone, “yes, we wish to know your opinion of the events of to-day and what you have heard said by people going in and out of the church.”

The mendicant shook his head.

“These are melancholy doings, your reverence, which always fall again upon the poor. As to what is said, everybody is discontented, everybody complains, but ‘everybody’ means ‘nobody.’”

“Explain yourself, my good friend,” said the coadjutor.

“I mean that all these cries, all these complaints, these curses, produce nothing but storms and flashes and that is all; but the lightning will not strike until there is a hand to guide it.”

“My friend,” said Gondy, “you seem to be a clever and a thoughtful man; are you disposed to take a part in a little civil war, should we have one, and put at the command of the leader, should we find one, your personal influence and the influence you have acquired over your comrades?”

“Yes, sir, provided this war were approved of by the

church and would advance the end I wish to attain—I mean, the remission of my sins.”

“The war will not only be approved of, but directed by the church. As for the remission of your sins, we have the archbishop of Paris, who has the very greatest power at the court of Rome, and even the coadjutor, who possesses some plenary indulgences; we will recommend you to him.”

“Consider, Maillard,” said the curate, “that I have recommended you to this gentleman, who is a powerful lord, and that I have made myself responsible for you.”

“I know, monsieur le curé,” said the beggar, “that you have always been very kind to me, and therefore I, in my turn, will be serviceable to you.”

“And do you think your power as great with the fraternity as monsieur le curé told me it was just now?”

“I think they have some esteem for me,” said the mendicant with pride, “and that not only will they obey me, but wherever I go they will follow me.”

“And could you count on fifty resolute men, good, unemployed, but active souls, brawlers, capable of bringing down the walls of the Palais Royal by crying, ‘Down with Mazarin,’ as fell those at Jericho?”

“I think,” said the beggar, “I can undertake things more difficult and more important than that.”

“Ah, ah,” said Gondy, “you will undertake, then, some night, to throw up some ten barricades?”

“I will undertake to throw up fifty, and when the day comes, to defend them.”

“I’faith!” exclaimed Gondy, “you speak with a certainty that gives me pleasure; and since monsieur le curé can answer for you——”

“I answer for him,” said the curate.

“Here is a bag containing five hundred pistoles in gold; make all your arrangements and tell me where I shall be able to find you this evening at ten o’clock.”

“It must be on some elevated place, whence a given signal may be seen in every part of Paris.”

"Shall I give you a line for the vicar of St. Jacques de la Boucherie? he will let you into the rooms in his tower," said the curate.

"Capital," answered the mendicant.

"Then," said the coadjutor, "this evening, at ten o'clock, and if I am pleased with you another bag of five hundred pistoles will be at your disposal."

The eyes of the mendicant flashed with cupidity, but he quickly suppressed his emotion.

"This evening, sir," he replied, "all will be ready."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE TOWER OF ST. JACQUES DE LA BOUCHERIE.

At a quarter to six o'clock, Monsieur de Gondy, having finished his business, returned to the archiepiscopal palace.

At six o'clock the curate of St. Merri was announced.

The coadjutor glanced rapidly behind and saw that he was followed by another man. The curate then entered, followed by Planchet.

"Your holiness," said the curate, "here is the person of whom I had the honor to speak to you."

Planchet saluted in the manner of one accustomed to fine houses.

"And you are disposed to serve the cause of the people?" asked Gondy.

"Most undoubtedly," said Planchet. "I am a Frondist from my heart. You see in me, such as I am, a person sentenced to be hung."

"And on what account?"

"I rescued from the hands of Mazarin's police a noble lord whom they were conducting back to the Bastille, where he had been for five years."

"Will you name him?"

"Oh, you know him well, my lord—it is Count de Rochefort."

"Ah! really, yes," said the coadjutor, "I have heard this affair mentioned. You raised the whole district, so they told me!"

"Very nearly," replied Planchet, with a self-satisfied air.

"And your business is——"

"That of a confectioner, in the Rue des Lombards."

"Explain to me how it happens that, following so peaceful a business, you had such warlike inclinations."

"Why does my lord, belonging to the church, now receive me in the dress of an officer, with a sword at his side and spurs to his boots?"

"Not badly answered, i'faith," said Gondy, laughing; "but I have, you must know, always had, in spite of my bands, warlike inclinations."

"Well, my lord, before I became a confectioner I myself was three years sergeant in the Piedmontese regiment, and before I became sergeant I was for eighteen months the servant of Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"The lieutenant of musketeers?" asked Gondy.

"Himself, my lord."

"But he is said to be a furious Mazarinist."

"Phew!" whistled Planchet.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing, my lord; Monsieur d'Artagnan belongs to the service; Monsieur d'Artagnan makes it his business to defend the cardinal, who pays him, as much as we make it ours, we citizens, to attack him, whom he robs."

"You are an intelligent fellow, my friend; can we count upon you?"

"You may count upon me, my lord, provided you want to make a complete upheaval of the city."

"'Tis that exactly. How many men, think you, you could collect together to-night?"

"Two hundred muskets and five hundred halberds."

"Let there be only one man in every district who can do as much and by to-morrow we shall have quite a powerful army. Are you disposed to obey Count de Rochefort?"

"I would follow him to hell, and that is saying not a little, as I believe him entirely capable of the descent."

"Bravo!"

"By what sign to-morrow shall we be able to distinguish friends from foes?"

"Every Frondist must put a knot of straw in his hat."

"Good! Give the watchword."

"Do you want money?"

"Money never comes amiss at any time, my lord; if one has it not, one must do without it; with it, matters go on much better and more rapidly."

Gondy went to a box and drew forth a bag.

"Here are five hundred pistoles," he said; "and if the action goes off well you may reckon upon a similar sum to-morrow."

"I will give a faithful account of the sum to your lordship," said Planchet, putting the bag under his arm.

"That is right; I recommend the cardinal to your attention."

"Make your mind easy, he is in good hands."

Planchet went out, the curate remaining for a moment.

"Are you satisfied, my lord?" he asked.

"Yes; he appears to be a resolute fellow."

"Well, he will do more than he has promised."

"He will do wonders, then."

The curate rejoined Planchet, who was waiting for him on the stairs. Ten minutes later the curate of St. Sulpice was announced. As soon as the door of Gondy's study was opened a man rushed in. It was the Count de Rochefort.

"'Tis you, then, my dear count," cried Gondy, offering his hand.

"You have made up your mind at last, my lord?" said Rochefort.

"It has been made up a long time," said Gondy.

"Let us say no more on the subject; you tell me so, I believe you. Well, we are going to give a ball to Mazarin."

"I hope so."

"And when will the dance begin?"

"The invitations are given for this evening," said the coadjutor, "but the violins will not begin to play until to-morrow morning."

"You may reckon upon me and upon fifty soldiers which the Chevalier d'Humières has promised to me whenever I need them."

"Upon fifty soldiers?"

"Yes, he is making recruits and he will lend them to me; if any are missing when the *fête* is over, I shall replace them."

"Good, my dear Rochefort; but that is not all. What have you done with Monsieur de Beaufort?"

"He is in Vendôme, where he will wait until I write to him to return to Paris."

"Write to him; now's the time."

"You are sure of your enterprise?"

"Yes, but he must make haste; for hardly will the people of Paris have revolted before we shall have a score of princes begging to lead them. If he defers he will find the place of honor taken."

"Shall I send word to him as coming from you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Shall I tell him that he can count on you?"

"To the end."

"And you will leave the command to him?"

"Of the war, yes; but in politics——"

"You must know it is not his element."

"He must leave me to negotiate for my cardinal's hat in my own fashion."

"You care about it, then, so much?"

"Since they force me to wear a hat of a form which does not become me," said Gondy, "I wish at least that the hat should be red."

"One must not dispute matters of taste and colors," said Rochefort, laughing. "I answer for his consent."

"How soon can he be here?"

"In five days."

"Let him come and he will find a change, I will answer for it."

"Therefore, go and collect your fifty men and hold yourself in readiness."

"For what?"

"For everything."

"Is there any signal for the general rally?"

"A knot of straw in the hat."

"Very good. Adieu, my lord."

"Adieu, my dear Rochefort."

"Ah, Monsieur Mazarin, Monsieur Mazarin," said Rochefort, leading off his curate, who had not found an opportunity of uttering a single word during the foregoing dialogue, "you will see whether I am too old to be a man of action."

It was half-past nine o'clock and the coadjutor required half an hour to go from the archbishop's palace to the tower of St. Jacques de la Boucherie. He remarked that a light was burning in one of the highest windows of the tower. "Good," said he, "our syndic is at his post."

He knocked and the door was opened. The vicar himself awaited him, conducted him to the top of the tower and when there pointed to a little door, placed the light which he had brought with him in a corner of the wall, that the coadjutor might be able to find it on his return, and went down again. Although the key was in the door the coadjutor knocked.

"Come in," said a voice which he recognized as that of the mendicant, whom he found lying on a kind of truckle bed. He rose on the entrance of the coadjutor and at that moment ten o'clock struck.

"Well," said Gondy, "have you kept your word with me?"

"Not exactly," replied the mendicant.

"How is that?"

"You asked me for five hundred men, did you not? Well, I have ten thousand for you."

"You are not boasting?"

"Do you wish for a proof?"

"Yes."

There were three candles alight, each of which burnt before a window, one looking upon the city, the other upon the Palais Royal and a third upon the Rue Saint Denis.

The man went silently to each of the candles and blew them out one after the other.

"What are you doing?" asked the coadjutor.

"I have given the signal."

"For what?"

"For the barricades. When you leave this you will behold my men at work. Only take care you do not break your legs in stumbling over some chain or your neck by falling in a hole."

"Good! there is your money, the same sum as that you have received already. Now remember that you are a general and do not go and drink."

"For twenty years I have tasted nothing but water."

The man took the bag from the hands of the coadjutor, who heard the sound of his fingers counting and handling the gold pieces.

"Ah! ah!" said the coadjutor, "you are avaricious, my good fellow."

The mendicant sighed and threw down the bag.

"Must I always be the same?" said he, "and shall I never succeed in overcoming the old leaven? Oh, misery, oh, vanity!"

"You take it, however."

"Yes, but I make hereby a vow in your presence, to employ all that remains to me in pious works."

His face was pale and drawn, like that of a man who had just undergone some inward struggle.

"Singular man!" muttered Gondy, taking his hat to go away; but on turning around he saw the beggar between him and the door. His first idea was that this man intended to do him some harm, but on the contrary he saw him fall on his knees before him with his hands clasped.

"Your blessing, your holiness, before you go, I beseech you!" he cried.

"Your holiness!" said Gondy; "my friend, you take me for some one else."

"No, your holiness, I take you for what you are, that is to say, the coadjutor; I recognized you at the first glance."

Gondy smiled. "And you want my blessing?" he said.

"Yes, I have need of it."

The mendicant uttered these words in a tone of such humility, such earnest repentance, that Gondy placed his hand upon him and gave him his benediction with all the unction of which he was capable.

"Now," said Gondy, "there is a communion between us. I have blessed you and you are sacred to me. Come, have you committed some crime, pursued by human justice, from which I can protect you?"

The beggar shook his head. "The crime which I have committed, my lord, has no call upon human justice and you can only deliver me from it by blessing me frequently, as you have just done."

"Come, be candid," said the coadjutor, "you have not all your life followed the trade which you do now?"

"No, my lord. I have pursued it for six years only."

"And previously, where were you?"

"In the Bastile."

"And before you went to the Bastile?"

"I will tell you, my lord, on the day when you are willing to hear my confession."

"Good! at whatsoever hour of the day or night you may present yourself, remember that I shall be ready to give you absolution."

"Thank you, my lord," said the mendicant in a hoarse voice. "But I am not yet ready to receive it."

"Very well. Adieu."

"Adieu, your holiness," said the mendicant, opening the door and bending low before the prelate.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE RIOT.

It was about eleven o'clock at night. Gondy had not walked a hundred steps ere he perceived the strange change which had been made in the streets of Paris.

The whole city seemed peopled with fantastic beings; silent shadows were seen unpaving the streets and others dragging and upsetting great wagons, whilst others again dug ditches large enough to engulf whole regiments of horsemen. These active beings flitted here and there like so many demons completing some unknown labor; these were the beggars of the Court of Miracles — the agents of the giver of holy water in the Square of Saint Eustache, preparing barricades for the morrow.

Gondy gazed on these deeds of darkness, on these nocturnal laborers, with a kind of fear; he asked himself, if, after having called forth these foul creatures from their dens, he should have the power of making them retire again. He felt almost inclined to cross himself when one of these beings happened to approach him. He reached the Rue Saint Honoré and went up it toward the Rue de la Ferronnerie; there the aspect changed; here it was the tradesmen who were running from shop to shop; their doors seemed closed like their shutters, but they were only pushed to in such a manner as to open and allow the men, who seemed fearful of showing what they carried, to enter, closing immediately. These men were shopkeepers, who had arms to lend to those who had none.

One individual went from door to door, bending under the weight of swords, guns, muskets and every kind of weapon,

which he deposited as fast as he could. By the light of a lantern the coadjutor recognized Planchet.

The coadjutor proceeded onward to the quay by way of the Rue de la Monnaie; there he found groups of bourgeois clad in black cloaks or gray, according as they belonged to the upper or lower bourgeoisie. They were standing motionless, while single men passed from one group to another. All these cloaks, gray or black, were raised behind by the point of a sword, or before by the barrel of an arquebuse or a musket.

On reaching the Pont Neuf the coadjutor found it strictly guarded and a man approached him.

"Who are you?" asked the man. "I do not know you for one of us."

"Then it is because you do not know your friends, my dear Monsieur Louvières," said the coadjutor, raising his hat.

Louvières recognized him and bowed.

Gondy continued his way and went as far as the Tour de Nesle. There he saw a lengthy chain of people gliding under the walls. They might be said to be a procession of ghosts, for they were all wrapped in white cloaks. When they reached a certain spot these men appeared to be annihilated, one after the other, as if the earth had opened under their feet. Gondy, edged into a corner, saw them vanish from the first until the last but one. The last raised his eyes, to ascertain, doubtless, that neither his companions nor himself had been watched, and, in spite of the darkness, he perceived Gondy. He walked straight up to him and placed a pistol to his throat.

"Halloo! Monsieur de Rochefort," said Gondy, laughing, "are you a boy to play with firearms?"

Rochefort recognized the voice.

"Ah, it is you, my lord!" said he.

"The very same. What people are you leading thus into the bowels of the earth?"

"My fifty recruits from the Chevalier d'Humières, who are destined to enter the light cavalry and who have only received as yet for their equipment their white cloaks."

"And where are you going?"

"To the house of one of my friends, a sculptor, only we enter by the trap through which he lets down his marble."

"Very good," said Gondy, shaking Rochefort by the hand, who descended in his turn and closed the trap after him.

It was now one o'clock in the morning and the coadjutor returned home. He opened a window and leaned out to listen. A strange, incomprehensible, unearthly sound seemed to pervade the whole city; one felt that something unusual and terrible was happening in all the streets, now dark as ocean's most unfathomable caves. From time to time a dull sound was heard, like that of a rising tempest or a billow of the sea; but nothing clear, nothing distinct, nothing intelligible; it was like those mysterious subterraneous noises that precede an earthquake.

The work of revolt continued the whole night thus. The next morning, on awaking, Paris seemed to be startled at her own appearance. It was like a besieged town. Armed men, shouldering muskets, watched over the barricades with menacing looks; words of command, patrols, arrests, executions, even, were encountered at every step. Those bearing plumed hats and gold swords were stopped and made to cry, "Long live Broussel!" "Down with Mazarin!" and whoever refused to comply with this ceremony was hooted at, spat upon and even beaten. They had not yet begun to slay, but it was well felt that the inclination to do so was not wanting.

The barricades had been pushed as far as the Palais Royal. From the Rue de Bons Enfants to that of the Ferronnerie, from the Rue Saint Thomas-du-Louvre to the Pont Neuf, from the Rue Richelieu to the Porte Saint Honoré, there were more than ten thousand armed men; those who were at the front hurled defiance at the impassive sentinels of the regiment of guards posted around the Palais Royal, the gates of which were closed behind them, a precaution which made their situation precarious. Among these thousands moved, in bands numbering from one hundred to two hundred, pale and haggard men, clothed in rags,

who bore a sort of standard on which was inscribed these words: "BEHOLD THE MISERY OF THE PEOPLE!" Wherever these men passed, frenzied cries were heard; and there were so many of these bands that the cries were to be heard in all directions.

The astonishment of Mazarin and of Anne of Austria was great when it was announced to them that the city, which the previous evening they had left entirely tranquil, had awakened to such feverish commotion; nor would either the one or the other believe the reports that were brought to them, declaring they would rather rely on the evidence of their own eyes and ears. Then a window was opened and when they saw and heard they were convinced.

Mazarin shrugged his shoulders and pretended to despise the populace; but he turned visibly pale and ran to his closet, trembling all over, locked up his gold and jewels in his caskets and put his finest diamonds on his fingers. As for the queen, furious, and left to her own guidance, she went for the Maréchal de la Meilleraie and desired him to take as many men as he pleased and to go and see what was the meaning of this pleasantry.

The marshal was ordinarily very adventurous and was wont to hesitate at nothing; and he had that lofty contempt for the populace which army officers usually profess. He took a hundred and fifty men and attempted to go out by the Pont du Louvre, but there he met Rochefort and his fifty horsemen, attended by more than five hundred men. The marshal made no attempt to force that barrier and returned up the quay. But at Pont Neuf he found Louvières and his bourgeois. This time the marshal charged, but he was welcomed by musket shots, while stones fell like hail from all the windows. He left there three men.

He beat a retreat toward the market, but there he met Planchet with his halberdiers; their halberds were leveled at him threateningly. He attempted to ride over those gray cloaks, but the gray cloaks held their ground and the marshal retired toward the Rue Saint Honoré, leaving four of his guards dead on the field of battle.

The marshal then entered the Rue Saint Honoré, but there he was opposed by the barricades of the mendicant of Saint Eustache. They were guarded, not only by armed men, but even by women and children. Master Friquet, the owner of a pistol and of a sword which Louvières had given him, had organized a company of rogues like himself and was making a tremendous racket.

The marshal thought this barrier not so well fortified as the others and determined to break through it. He dismounted twenty men to make a breach in the barricade, whilst he and others, remaining on their horses, were to protect the assailants. The twenty men marched straight toward the barrier, but from behind the beams, from among the wagon-wheels and from the heights of the rocks a terrible fusillade burst forth and at the same time Planchet's halberdiers appeared at the corner of the Cemetery of the Innocents, and Louvières's bourgeois at the corner of the Rue de la Monnaie.

The Maréchal de la Meilleraie was caught between two fires, but he was brave and made up his mind to die where he was. He returned blow for blow and cries of pain began to be heard in the crowd. The guards, more skillful, did greater execution; but the bourgeois, more numerous, overwhelmed them with a veritable hurricane of iron. Men fell around him as they had fallen at Rocroy or at Lérida. Fontrailles, his aide-de-camp, had an arm broken; his horse had received a bullet in his neck and he had difficulty in controlling him, maddened by pain. In short, he had reached that supreme moment when the bravest feel a shudder in their veins, when suddenly, in the direction of the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, the crowd opened, crying: "Long live the coadjutor!" and Gondy, in surplice and cloak, appeared, moving tranquilly in the midst of the fusillade and bestowing his benedictions to the right and left, as undisturbed as if he were leading a procession of the *Fête Dieu*.

All fell to their knees. The marshal recognized him and hastened to meet him.

"Get me out of this, in Heaven's name!" he said, "or I shall leave my carcass here and those of all my men."

A great tumult arose, in the midst of which even the noise of thunder could not have been heard. Gondy raised his hand and demanded silence. All were still.

"My children," he said, "this is the Maréchal de la Meilleraie, as to whose intentions you have been deceived and who pledges himself, on returning to the Louvre, to demand of the queen, in your name, our Broussel's release. You pledge yourself to that, marshal?" added Gondy, turning to La Meilleraie.

"*Morbleu!*" cried the latter, "I should say that I do pledge myself to it! I had no hope of getting off so easily."

"He gives you his word of honor," said Gondy.

The marshal raised his hand in token of assent.

"Long live the coadjutor!" cried the crowd. Some voices even added: "Long live the marshal!" But all took up the cry in chorus: "Down with Mazarin!"

The crowd gave place, the barricade was opened, and the marshal, with the remnant of his company, retreated, preceded by Friquet and his bandits, some of them making a pretence of beating drums and others imitating the sound of the trumpet. It was almost a triumphal procession; only, behind the guards the barricades were closed again. The marshal bit his fingers.

In the meantime, as we have said, Mazarin was in his closet, putting his affairs in order. He called for D'Artagnan, but in the midst of such tumult he little expected to see him, D'Artagnan not being on service. In about ten minutes D'Artagnan appeared at the door, followed by the inseparable Porthos.

"Ah, come, come in, Monsieur d'Artagnan!" cried the cardinal, "and welcome your friend too. But what is going on in this accursed Paris?"

"What is going on, my lord? nothing good," replied D'Artagnan, shaking his head. "The town is in open revolt, and just now, as I was crossing the Rue Montorgueil with

Monsieur du Vallon, who is here, and is your humble servant, they wanted, in spite of my uniform, or perhaps because of my uniform, to make us cry, 'Long live Broussel!' and must I tell you, my lord, what they wished us to cry as well?"

"Speak, speak."

"'Down with Mazarin!' I'faith, the treasonable word is out."

Mazarin smiled, but became very pale.

"And you did cry?" he asked.

"I'faith, no," said D'Artagnan; "I was not in voice; Monsieur du Vallon has a cold and did not cry either. Then, my lord ——"

"Then, what?" asked Mazarin.

"Look at my hat and cloak."

And D'Artagnan displayed four gunshot holes in his cloak and two in his beaver. As for Porthos's coat, a blow from a halberd had cut it open on the flank and a pistol shot had cut his feather in two.

"*Diavolo!*" said the cardinal, pensively, gazing at the two friends with lively admiration; "I should have cried, I should."

At this moment the tumult was heard nearer.

Mazarin wiped his forehead and looked around him. He had a great desire to go to the window, but he dared not.

"See what is going on, Monsieur D'Artagnan," said he.

D'Artagnan went to the window with his habitual composure. "Oho!" said he, "what is this? Maréchal de la Meilleraie returning without a hat—Fonttrailles with his arm in a sling—wounded guards—horses bleeding; eh, then, what are the sentinels about? They are aiming—they are going to fire!"

"They have received orders to fire on the people if the people approach the Palais Royal!" exclaimed Mazarin.

"But if they fire, all is lost!" cried D'Artagnan.

"We have the gates."

"The gates! to hold for five minutes—the gates, they

will be torn down, twisted into iron wire, ground to powder! God's death, don't fire!" screamed D'Artagnan, throwing open the window.

In spite of this recommendation, which, owing to the noise, could scarcely have been heard, two or three musket shots resounded, succeeded by a terrible discharge. The balls might be heard peppering the façade of the Palais Royal, and one of them, passing under D'Artagnan's arm, entered and broke a mirror, in which Porthos was complacently admiring himself.

"Alack! alack!" cried the cardinal, "a Venetian glass!"

"Oh, my lord," said D'Artagnan, quietly shutting the window, "it is not worth while weeping yet, for probably an hour hence there will not be one of your mirrors remaining in the Palais Royal, whether they be Venetian or Parisian."

"But what do you advise, then?" asked Mazarin, trembling.

"Eh, egad, to give up Broussel as they demand! What the devil do you want with a member of the parliament? He is of no earthly use to anybody."

"And you, Monsieur du Vallon, is that your advice? What would you do?"

"I should give up Broussel," said Porthos.

"Come, come with me, gentlemen!" exclaimed Mazarin.

"I will go and discuss the matter with the queen."

He stopped at the end of the corridor and said:

"I can count upon you, gentlemen, can I not?"

"We do not give ourselves twice over," said D'Artagnan; "we have given ourselves to you; command, we shall obey."

"Very well, then," said Mazarin; "enter this cabinet and wait till I come back."

And turning off he entered the drawing-room by another door.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE RIOT BECOMES A REVOLUTION.

THE closet into which D'Artagnan and Porthos had been ushered was separated from the drawing-room where the queen was by tapestried curtains only, and this thin partition enabled them to hear all that passed in the adjoining room, whilst the aperture between the two hangings, small as it was, permitted them to see.

The queen was standing in the room, pale with anger; her self-control, however, was so great that it might have been imagined that she was calm. Comminges, Villequier and Guitant were behind her and the women again were behind the men. The Chancellor Sequier, who twenty years previously had persecuted her so ruthlessly, stood before her, relating how his carriage had been smashed, how he had been pursued and had rushed into the Hotel d'O——, that the hotel was immediately invaded, pillaged and devastated; happily he had time to reach a closet hidden behind tapestry, in which he was secreted by an old woman, together with his brother, the Bishop of Meaux. Then the danger was so imminent, the rioters came so near, uttering such threats, that the chancellor thought his last hour had come and confessed himself to his brother priest, so as to be all ready to die in case he was discovered. Fortunately, however, he had not been taken; the people, believing that he had escaped by some back entrance, retired and left him at liberty to retreat. Then, disguised in the clothes of the Marquis d'O——, he had left the hotel, stumbling over the bodies of an officer and two guards who had been killed whilst defending the street door.

During the recital Mazarin entered and glided noiselessly up to the queen to listen.

"Well," said the queen, when the chancellor had finished speaking; "what do you think of it all?"

"I think that matters look very gloomy, madame."

"But what step would you propose to me?"

"I *could* propose one to your majesty, but I *dare* not."

"You may, you may, sir," said the queen with a bitter smile; "you were not so timid once."

The chancellor reddened and stammered some words.

"It is not a question of the past, but of the present," said the queen; "you said you could give me advice — what is it?"

"Madame," said the chancellor, hesitating, "it would be to release Broussel."

The queen, although already pale, became visibly paler and her face was contracted.

"Release Broussel!" she cried, "never!"

At this moment steps were heard in the ante-room and without any announcement the Maréchal de la Meilleraie appeared at the door.

"Ah, there you are, maréchal," cried Anne of Austria, joyfully. "I trust you have brought this rabble to reason."

"Madame," replied the maréchal, "I have left three men on the Pont Neuf, four at the Halle, six at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec and two at the door of your palace — fifteen in all. I have brought away ten or twelve wounded. I know not where I have left my hat, and in all probability I should have been left with my hat, had the coadjutor not arrived in time to rescue me."

"Ah, indeed," said the queen, "it would have much astonished me if that low cur, with his distorted legs, had not been mixed up with all this."

"Madame," said La Meilleraie, "do not say too much against him before me, for the service he rendered me is still fresh."

"Very good," said the queen, "be as grateful as you like,

it does not implicate me ; you are here safe and sound, that is all I wished for ; you are not only welcome, but welcome back."

"Yes, madame ; but I only came back on one condition — that I would transmit to your majesty the will of the people."

"The will !" exclaimed the queen, frowning. "Oh ! oh ! monsieur maréchal, you must indeed have found yourself in wondrous peril to have undertaken so strange a commission !"

The irony with which these words were uttered did not escape the maréchal.

"Pardon, madame," he said, "I am not a lawyer, I am a mere soldier, and probably, therefore, I do not quite comprehend the value of certain words ; I ought to have said the wishes, and not the will, of the people. As for what you do me the honor to say, I presume you mean I was afraid ?"

The queen smiled.

"Well, then, madame, yes, I did feel fear ; and though I have been through twelve pitched battles and I cannot count how many charges and skirmishes, I own for the third time in my life I was afraid. Yes, and I would rather face your majesty, however threatening your smile, than face those demons who accompanied me hither and who sprung from I know not whence, unless from deepest hell."

("Bravo," said D'Artagnan in a whisper to Porthos ; "well answered.")

"Well," said the queen, biting her lips, whilst her courtiers looked at each other with surprise, "what is the desire of my people ?"

"That Broussel shall be given up to them, madame."

"Never !" said the queen, "never !"

"Your majesty is mistress," said La Meilleraie, retreating a few steps.

"Where are you going, maréchal ?" asked the queen.

"To give your majesty's reply to those who await it."

"Stay, maréchal ; I will not appear to parley with rebels."

"Madame, I have pledged my word, and unless you order me to be arrested I shall be forced to return."

Anne of Austria's eyes shot glances of fire.

"Oh! that is no impediment, sir," said she; "I have had greater men than you arrested — Guitant!"

Mazarin sprang forward.

"Madame," said he, "if I dared in my turn advise ——"

"Would it be to give up Broussel, sir? If so, you can spare yourself the trouble."

"No," said Mazarin; "although, perhaps, that counsel is as good as any other."

"Then what may it be?"

"To call for monsieur le coadjuteur."

"The coadjutor!" cried the queen, "that dreadful mischief maker! It is he who has raised all this revolt."

"The more reason," said Mazarin; "if he has raised it he can put it down."

"And, hold, madame," suggested Comminges, who was near a window, out of which he could see; "hold, the moment is a happy one, for there he is now, giving his blessing in the square of the Palais Royal."

The queen sprang to the window.

"It is true," she said; "the arch hypocrite — see!"

"I see," said Mazarin, "that everybody kneels before him, although he be but coadjutor, whilst I, were I in his place, though I am cardinal, should be torn to pieces. I persist, then, madame, in my wish" (he laid an emphasis on the word), "that your majesty should receive the coadjutor."

"And wherefore do you not say, like the rest, your *will*?" replied the queen, in a low voice.

Mazarin bowed.

"Monsieur le maréchal," said the queen, after a moment's reflection, "go and find the coadjutor and bring him to me."

"And what shall I say to the people?"

"That they must have patience," said Anne, "as I have."

The fiery Spanish woman spoke in a tone so imperative that the maréchal made no reply; he bowed and went out.

(D'Artagnan turned to Porthos. "How will this end?" he said.

"We shall soon see," said Porthos, in his tranquil way.)

In the meantime Anne of Austria approached Comminges and conversed with him in a subdued tone, whilst Mazarin glanced uneasily at the corner occupied by D'Artagnan and Porthos. Ere long the door opened and the *maréchal* entered, followed by the coadjutor.

"There, madame," he said, "is Monsieur Gondy, who hastens to obey your majesty's summons."

The queen advanced a few steps to meet him, and then stopped, cold, severe, unmoved, with her lower lip scornfully protruded.

Gondy bowed respectfully.

"Well, sir," said the queen, "what is your opinion of this riot?"

"That it is no longer a riot, madame," he replied, "but a revolt."

"The revolt is at the door of those who think my people can rebel," cried Anne, unable to dissimulate before the coadjutor, whom she looked upon, and probably with reason, as the promoter of the tumult. "Revolt! thus it is called by those who have wished for this demonstration and who are, perhaps, the cause of it; but, wait, wait! the king's authority will put all this to rights."

"Was it to tell me that, madame," coldly replied Gondy, "that your majesty admitted me to the honor of entering your presence?"

"No, my dear coadjutor," said Mazarin; "it was to ask your advice in the unhappy dilemma in which we find ourselves."

"Is it true," asked Gondy, feigning astonishment, "that her majesty summoned me to ask for my opinion?"

"Yes," said the queen, "it is requested."

The coadjutor bowed.

"Your majesty wishes, then ——"

"You to say what you would do in her place," Mazarin hastened to reply.

The coadjutor looked at the queen, who replied by a sign in the affirmative.

"Were I in her majesty's place," said Gondy, coldly, "I should not hesitate; I should release Broussel."

"And if I do not give him up, what think you will be the result?" exclaimed the queen.

"I believe that not a stone in Paris will remain unturned," put in the maréchal.

"It was not your opinion that I asked," said the queen, sharply, without even turning around.

"If it is I whom your majesty interrogates," replied the coadjutor in the same calm manner, "I reply that I hold monsieur le maréchal's opinion in every respect."

The color mounted to the queen's face; her fine blue eyes seemed to start out of her head and her carmine lips, compared by all the poets of the day to a pomegranate in flower, were trembling with anger. Mazarin himself, who was well accustomed to the domestic outbreaks of this disturbed household, was alarmed.

"Give up Broussel!" she cried; "fine counsel, indeed. Upon my word! one can easily see it comes from a priest."

Gondy remained firm, and the abuse of the day seemed to glide over his head as the sarcasms of the evening before had done; but hatred and revenge were accumulating in his heart silently and drop by drop. He looked coldly at the queen, who nudged Mazarin to make him say something in his turn.

Mazarin, according to his custom, was thinking much and saying little.

"Ho! ho!" said he, "good advice, advice of a friend. I, too, would give up that good Monsieur Broussel, dead or alive, and all would be at an end."

"If you yield him dead, all will indeed be at an end, my lord, but quite otherwise than you mean."

"Did I say 'dead or alive?'" replied Mazarin. "It was only a way of speaking. You know I am not familiar with the French language, which you, monsieur le coadjuteur, both speak and write so well."

("This is a council of state," D'Artagnan remarked to Porthos; "but we held better ones at La Rochelle, with Athos and Aramis.")

"At the Saint Gervais bastion," said Porthos.

"There and elsewhere.")

The coadjutor let the storm pass over his head and resumed, still with the same tranquillity:

"Madame, if the opinion I have submitted to you does not please you it is doubtless because you have better counsels to follow. I know too well the wisdom of the queen and that of her advisers to suppose that they will leave the capital long in trouble that may lead to a revolution."

"Thus, then, it is your opinion," said Anne of Austria, with a sneer and biting her lips with rage, "that yesterday's riot, which to-day is already a rebellion, to-morrow may become a revolution?"

"Yes, madame," replied the coadjutor, gravely.

"But if I am to believe you, sir, the people seem to have thrown off all restraint."

"It is a bad year for kings," said Gondy, shaking his head; "look at England, madame."

"Yes; but fortunately we have no Oliver Cromwell in France," replied the queen.

"Who knows?" said Gondy; "such men are like thunderbolts—one recognizes them only when they have struck."

Every one shuddered and there was a moment of silence, during which the queen pressed her hand to her side, evidently to still the beatings of her heart.

("Porthos," murmured D'Artagnan, "look well at that priest.")

"Yes," said Porthos, "I see him. What then?"

"Well, he is a man."

Porthos looked at D'Artagnan in astonishment. Evidently he did not understand his meaning.)

"Your majesty," continued the coadjutor, pitilessly, "is about to take such measures as seem good to you, but I fore-

see that they will be violent and such as will still further exasperate the rioters."

"In that case, you, monsieur le coadjuteur, who have such power over them and are at the same time friendly to us," said the queen, ironically, "will quiet them by bestowing your blessing upon them."

"Perhaps it will be too late," said Gondy, still unmoved; "perhaps I shall have lost all influence; while by giving up Broussel your majesty will strike at the root of the sedition and will gain the right to punish severely any revival of the revolt."

"Have I not, then, that right?" cried the queen.

"If you have it, use it," replied Gondy.

("Peste!" said D'Artagnan to Porthos. "There is a man after my own heart. Oh! if he were minister and I were his D'Artagnan, instead of belonging to that beast of a Mazarin, *mordieu!* what fine things we would do together!")

"Yes," said Porthos.)

The queen made a sign for every one, except Mazarin, to quit the room; and Gondy bowed, as if to leave with the rest.

"Stay, sir," said Anne to him.

"Good," thought Gondy, "she is going to yield."

("She is going to have him killed," said D'Artagnan to Porthos, "but at all events it shall not be by me. I swear to Heaven, on the contrary, that if they fall upon him I will fall upon them.")

"And I, too," said Porthos.)

"Good," muttered Mazarin, sitting down, "we shall soon see something startling."

The queen's eyes followed the retreating figures and when the last had closed the door she turned away. It was evident that she was making unnatural efforts to subdue her anger; she fanned herself, smelled at her vinaigrette and walked up and down. Gondy, who began to feel uneasy, examined the tapestry with his eyes, touched the coat of mail which he wore under his long gown and felt from time

to time to see if the handle of a good Spanish dagger, which was hidden under his cloak, was well within reach.

"And now," at last said the queen, "now that we are alone, repeat your counsel, monsieur le coadjuteur."

"It is this, madame: that you should appear to have reflected, and publicly acknowledge an error, which constitutes the extra strength of a strong government; release Broussel from prison and give him back to the people."

"Oh!" cried Anne, "to humble myself thus! Am I, or am I not, the queen? This screaming mob, are they, or are they not, my subjects? Have I friends? Have I guards? Ah! by Notre Dame! as Queen Catherine used to say," continued she, excited by her own words, "rather than give up this infamous Broussel to them I will strangle him with my own hands!"

And she sprang toward Gondy, whom assuredly at that moment she hated more than Broussel, with outstretched arms. The coadjutor remained immovable and not a muscle of his face was discomposed; only his glance flashed like a sword in returning the furious looks of the queen.

("He were a dead man," said the Gascon, "if there were still a Vitry at the court and if Vitry entered at this moment; but for my part, before he could reach the good prelate I would kill Vitry at once; the cardinal would be infinitely pleased with me.")

"Hush!" said Porthos; "listen.")

"Madame," cried the cardinal, seizing hold of Anne and drawing her back, "Madame, what are you about?"

Then he added in Spanish, "Anne, are you mad? You, a queen to quarrel like a washerwoman! And do you not perceive that in the person of this priest is represented the whole people of Paris and that it is dangerous to insult him at this moment, and if this priest wished it, in an hour you would be without a crown? Come, then, on another occasion you can be firm and strong; but to-day is not the proper time; to-day, flatter and caress, or you are only a common woman."

(At the first words of this address D'Artagnan had seized Porthos's arm, which he pressed with gradually increasing force. When Mazarin ceased speaking he said to Porthos in a low tone :

"Never tell Mazarin that I understand Spanish, or I am a lost man and you are also."

"All right," said Porthos.)

This rough appeal, marked by the eloquence which characterized Mazarin when he spoke in Italian or Spanish and which he lost entirely in speaking French, was uttered with such impenetrable expression that Gondy, clever physiognomist as he was, had no suspicion of its being more than a simple warning to be more subdued.

The queen, on her part, thus chided, softened immediately and sat down, and in an almost weeping voice, letting her arms fall by her side, said :

"Pardon me, sir, and attribute this violence to what I suffer. A woman, and consequently subject to the weaknesses of my sex, I am alarmed at the idea of civil war ; a queen, accustomed to be obeyed, I am excited at the first opposition."

"Madame," replied Gondy, bowing, "your majesty is mistaken in qualifying my sincere advice as opposition. Your majesty has none but submissive and respectful subjects. It is not the queen with whom the people are displeased ; they ask for Broussel and are only too happy, if you release him to them, to live under your government."

Mazarin, who at the words, "It is not the queen with whom the people are displeased," had pricked up his ears, thinking that the coadjutor was about to speak of the cries, "Down with Mazarin," and pleased with Gondy's suppression of this fact, he said with his sweetest voice and his most gracious expression :

"Madame, credit the coadjutor, who is one of the most able politicians we have ; the first available cardinal's hat seems to belong already to his noble brow."

"Ah ! how much you have need of me, cunning rogue !" thought Gondy.

("And what will he promise us?" said D'Artagnan. "*Peste*, if he is giving away hats like that, Porthos, let us look out and both demand a regiment to-morrow. *Corbleu!* let the civil war last but one year and I will have a constable's sword gilt for me."

"And for me?" put in Porthos.

"For you? I will give you the bâton of the Maréchal de la Meilleraie, who does not seem to be much in favor just now."

"And so, sir," said the queen, "you are seriously afraid of a public tumult."

"Seriously," said Gondy, astonished at not having further advanced; "I fear that when the torrent has broken its embankment it will cause fearful destruction."

"And I," said the queen, "think that in such a case other embankments should be raised to oppose it. Go; I will reflect."

Gondy looked at Mazarin, astonished, and Mazarin approached the queen to speak to her, but at this moment a frightful tumult arose from the square of the Palais Royal.

Gondy smiled, the queen's color rose and Mazarin grew even paler.

"What is that again?" he asked.

At this moment Comminges rushed into the room.

"Pardon, your majesty," he cried, "but the people have dashed the sentinels against the gates and they are now forcing the doors; what are your commands?"

"Listen, madame," said Gondy.

The moaning of waves, the noise of thunder, the roaring of a volcano, cannot be compared with the tempest of cries heard at that moment.

"What are my commands?" said the queen.

"Yes, for time presses."

"How many men have you about the Palais Royal?"

"Six hundred."

"Place a hundred around the king and with the remainder sweep away this mob for me."

"Madame," cried Mazarin, "what are you about?"

"Go!" said the queen.

Comminges went out with a soldier's passive obedience.

At this moment a monstrous battering was heard. One of the gates began to yield.

"Oh! madame," cried Mazarin, "you have ruined us all — the king, yourself and me."

At this cry from the soul of the frightened cardinal, Anne became alarmed in her turn and would have recalled Comminges.

"It is too late," said Mazarin, tearing his hair, "too late!"

The gate had given way. Hoarse shouts were heard from the excited mob. D'Artagnan put his hand to his sword, motioning to Porthos to follow his example.

"Save the queen!" cried Mazarin to the coadjutor.

Gondy sprang to the window and threw it open; he recognized Louvières at the head of a troop of about three or four thousand men.

"Not a step further," he shouted, "the queen is signing!"

"What are you saying?" asked the queen.

"The truth, madame," said Mazarin, placing a pen and a paper before her; "you must;" then he added: "Sign, Anne, I implore you — I *command* you."

The queen fell into a chair, took the pen and signed.

The people, kept back by Louvières, had not made another step forward; but the awful murmuring, which indicates an angry people, continued.

The queen had written, "The keeper of the prison at Saint Germain will set Councillor Broussel at liberty;" and she had signed it.

The coadjutor, whose eyes devoured her slightest movements, seized the paper immediately the signature had been affixed to it, returned to the window and waved it in his hand.

"This is the order," he said.

All Paris seemed to shout with joy, and then the air

resounded with the cries of "Long live Broussel!" "Long live the coadjutor!"

"Long live the queen!" cried De Gondy; but the cries which replied to his were poor and few, and perhaps he had but uttered it to make Anne of Austria sensible of her weakness.

"And now that you have obtained what you want, go," said she, "Monsieur de Gondy."

"Whenever her majesty has need of me," replied the coadjutor, bowing, "her majesty knows I am at her command."

"Ah, cursed priest!" cried Anne, when he had retired, stretching out her arm to the scarcely closed door, "one day I will make you drink the dregs of the atrocious gall you have poured out on me to-day."

Mazarin wished to approach her. "Leave me!" she exclaimed; "you are not a man!" and she went out of the room.

"It is you who are not a woman," muttered Mazarin.

Then, after a moment of reverie, he remembered where he had left D'Artagnan and Porthos and that they must have overheard everything. He knit his brows and went direct to the tapestry, which he pushed aside. The closet was empty.

At the queen's last word, D'Artagnan had dragged Porthos into the gallery. Thither Mazarin went in his turn and found the two friends walking up and down.

"Why did you leave the closet, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" asked the cardinal.

"Because," replied D'Artagnan, "the queen desired every one to leave and I thought that this command was intended for us as well as for the rest."

"And you have been here since——"

"About a quarter of an hour," said D'Artagnan, motioning to Porthos not to contradict him.

Mazarin saw the sign and remained convinced that D'Artagnan had seen and heard everything; but he was pleased with his falsehood.

“Decidedly, Monsieur d’Artagnan, you are the man I have been seeking. You may reckon upon me and so may your friend.” Then bowing to the two musketeers with his most gracious smile, he re-entered his closet more calmly, for on the departure of De Gondy the uproar had ceased as though by enchantment.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MISFORTUNE REFRESHES THE MEMORY.

ANNE OF AUSTRIA returned to her oratory, furious.

"What!" she cried, wringing her beautiful hands, "What! the people have seen Monsieur de Condé, a prince of the blood royal, arrested by my mother-in-law, Maria de Medicis; they saw my mother-in-law, their former regent, expelled by the cardinal; they saw Monsieur de Vendôme, that is to say, the son of Henry IV., a prisoner at Vincennes; and whilst these great personages were imprisoned, insulted and threatened, they said nothing; and now for a Broussel — good God! what, then, is to become of royalty?"

The queen unconsciously touched here upon the exciting question. The people had made no demonstration for the princes, but they had risen for Broussel; they were taking the part of a plebeian and in defending Broussel they instinctively felt they were defending themselves.

During this time Mazarin walked up and down the study, glancing from time to time at his beautiful Venetian mirror, starred in every direction. "Ah!" he said, "it is sad, I know well, to be forced to yield thus; but, pshaw! we shall have our revenge. What matters it about Broussel — it is a name, not a thing."

Mazarin, clever politician as he was, was for once mistaken; Broussel was a thing, not a name.

The next morning, therefore, when Broussel made his entrance into Paris in a large carriage, having his son Louvières at his side and Friquet behind the vehicle, the people threw themselves in his way and cries of "Long live Broussel!" "Long live our father!" resounded from all parts and

was death to Mazarin's ears ; and the cardinal's spies brought bad news from every direction, which greatly agitated the minister, but was calmly received by the queen. The latter seemed to be maturing in her mind some great stroke, a fact which increased the uneasiness of the cardinal, who knew the proud princess and dreaded much the determination of Anne of Austria.

The coadjutor returned to parliament more a monarch than king, queen, and cardinal, all three together. By his advice a decree from parliament summoned the citizens to lay down their arms and demolish the barricades. They now knew that it required but one hour to take up arms again and one night to reconstruct the barricades.

Rochefort had returned to the Chevalier d'Humières his fifty horsemen, less two, missing at roll call. But the chevalier was himself at heart a Frondist and would hear nothing said of compensation.

The mendicant had gone to his old place on the steps of Saint Eustache and was again distributing holy water with one hand and asking alms with the other. No one could suspect that those two hands had been engaged with others in drawing out from the social edifice the keystone of royalty.

Louvières was proud and satisfied ; he had taken revenge on Mazarin and had aided in his father's deliverance from prison. His name had been mentioned as a name of terror at the Palais Royal. Laughingly he said to the councillor, restored to his family :

"Do you think, father, that if now I should ask for a company the queen would give it to me ?"

D'Artagnan profited by this interval of calm to send away Raoul, whom he had great difficulty in keeping shut up during the riot, and who wished positively to strike a blow for one party or the other. Raoul had offered some opposition at first ; but D'Artagnan made use of the Comte de la Fère's name, and after paying a visit to Madame de Chevreuse, Raoul started to rejoin the army.

Rochefort alone was dissatisfied with the termination of

affairs. He had written to the Duc de Beaufort to come and the duke was about to arrive, and he would find Paris tranquil. He went to the coadjutor to consult with him whether it would not be better to send word to the duke to stop on the road, but Gondy reflected for a moment, and then said :

“ Let him continue his journey.”

“ All is not then over ? ” asked Rochefort.

“ My dear count, we have only just begun.”

“ What induces you to think so ? ”

“ The knowledge that I have of the queen’s heart ; she will not rest contented beaten.”

“ Is she, then, preparing for a stroke ? ”

“ I hope so.”

“ Come, let us see what you know.”

“ I know that she has written to the prince to return in haste from the army.”

“ Ah ! ha ! ” said Rochefort, “ you are right. We must let Monsieur de Beaufort come.”

In fact, the evening after this conversation the report was circulated that the Prince de Condé had arrived. It was a very simple, natural circumstance and yet it created a profound sensation. It was said that Madame de Longueville, for whom the prince had more than a brother’s affection and in whom he had confided, had been indiscreet. His confidence had unveiled the sinister project of the queen.

Even on the night of the prince’s return, some citizens, bolder than the rest, such as the sheriffs, captains and the quartermaster, went from house to house among their friends, saying :

“ Why do we not take the king and place him in the Hôtel de Ville ? It is a shame to leave him to be educated by our enemies, who will give him evil counsel ; whereas, brought up by the coadjutor, for instance, he would imbibe national principles and love his people.”

That night the question was secretly agitated and on the morrow the gray and black cloaks, the patrols of armed shop-people, and the bands of mendicants reappeared.

The queen had passed the night in lonely conference with the prince, who had entered the oratory at midnight and did not leave till five o'clock in the morning.

At five o'clock Anne went to the cardinal's room. If she had not yet taken any repose, he at least was already up. Six days had already passed out of the ten he had asked from Mordaunt; he was therefore occupied in revising his reply to Cromwell, when some one knocked gently at the door of communication with the queen's apartments. Anne of Austria alone was permitted to enter by that door. The cardinal therefore rose to open it.

The queen was in a morning gown, but it became her still; for, like Diana of Poitiers and Ninon, Anne of Austria enjoyed the privilege of remaining ever beautiful; nevertheless, this morning she looked handsomer than usual, for her eyes had all the sparkle inward satisfaction adds to expression.

"What is the matter, madame?" said Mazarin, uneasily. "You seem secretly elated."

"Yes, Giulio," she said; "proud and happy; for I have found the means of strangling this hydra."

"You are a great politician, my queen," said Mazarin; "let us hear the means." And he hid what he had written by sliding the letter under a folio of blank paper.

"You know," said the queen, "that they want to take the king away from me?"

"Alas! yes, and to hang me."

"They shall not have the king."

"Nor hang me."

"Listen. I want to carry off my son from them, with yourself. I wish that this event, which on the day it is known will completely change the aspect of affairs, should be accomplished without the knowledge of any others but yourself, myself, and a third person."

"And who is this third person?"

"Monsieur le Prince."

"He has come, then, as they told me?"

"Last evening."

"And you have seen him?"

"He has just left me."

"And will he aid this project?"

"The plan is his own."

"And Paris?"

"He will starve it out and force it to surrender at discretion."

"The plan is not wanting in grandeur; I see but one impediment."

"What is it?"

"Impossibility."

"A senseless word. Nothing is impossible."

"On paper."

"In execution. We have money?"

"A little," said Mazarin, trembling, lest Anne should ask to draw upon his purse.

"Troops?"

"Five or six thousand men."

"Courage?"

"Plenty."

"Then the thing is easy. Oh! do think of it, Giulio! Paris, this odious Paris, waking up one morning without queen or king, surrounded, besieged, famished — having for its sole resource its stupid parliament and their coadjutor with crooked limbs!"

"Charming! charming!" said Mazarin. "I can imagine the effect, I do not see the means."

"I will find the means myself."

"You are aware it will be war, civil war, furious, devouring, implacable?"

"Oh! yes, yes, war," said Anne of Austria. "Yes, I will reduce this rebellious city to ashes. I will extinguish the fire with blood! I will perpetuate the crime and punishment by making a frightful example. Paris! I — I detest, I loathe it!"

"Very fine, Anne. You are now sanguinary; but take

care. We are not in the time of Malatesta and Castruccio Castracani. You will get yourself decapitated, my beautiful queen, and that would be a pity."

"You laugh."

"Faintly. It is dangerous to go to war with a nation. Look at your brother monarch, Charles I. He is badly off, very badly."

"We are in France, and I am Spanish."

"So much the worse; I had much rather you were French and myself also; they would hate us both less."

"Nevertheless, you consent?"

"Yes, if the thing be possible."

"It is; it is I who tell you so; make preparations for departure."

"I! I am always prepared to go, only, as you know, I never do go, and perhaps shall go this time as little as before."

"In short, if I go, will you go too?"

"I will try."

"You torment me, Giulio, with your fears; and what are you afraid of, then?"

"Of many things."

"What are they?"

Mazarin's face, smiling as it was, became clouded.

"Anne," said he, "you are but a woman and as a woman you may insult men at your ease, knowing that you can do it with impunity. You accuse me of fear; I have not so much as you have, since I do not fly as you do. Against whom do they cry out? is it against you or against myself? Whom would they hang, yourself or me? Well, I can weather the storm—I, whom, notwithstanding, you tax with fear—not with bravado, that is not my way; but I am firm. Imitate me. Make less hubbub and think more deeply. You cry very loud, you end by doing nothing; you talk of flying——"

Mazarin shrugged his shoulders and taking the queen's hand led her to the window.

"Look!" he said.

"Well?" said the queen, blinded by her obstinacy.

"Well, what do you see from this window? If I am not mistaken those are citizens, helmeted and mailed, armed with good muskets, as in the time of the League, and whose eyes are so intently fixed on this window that they will see you if you raise that curtain much; and now come to the other side—what do you see? Creatures of the people, armed with halberds, guarding your doors. You will see the same at every opening from this palace to which I should lead you. Your doors are guarded, the airholes of your cellars are guarded, and I could say to you, as that good La Ramee said to me of the Duc de Beaufort, you must be either bird or mouse to get out."

"He did get out, nevertheless."

"Do you think of escaping in the same way?"

"I am a prisoner, then?"

"*Parbleu!*" said Mazarin, "I have been proving it to you this last hour."

And he quietly resumed his dispatch at the place where he had been interrupted.

Anne, trembling with anger and scarlet with humiliation, left the room, shutting the door violently after her. Mazarin did not even turn around. When once more in her own apartment Anne fell into a chair and wept; then suddenly struck with an idea:

"I am saved!" she exclaimed, rising; "oh, yes! yes! I know a man who will find the means of taking me from Paris, a man I have too long forgotten." Then falling into a reverie, she added, however, with an expression of joy, "Ungrateful woman that I am, for twenty years I have forgotten this man, whom I ought to have made a *maréchal* of France. My mother-in-law expended gold, caresses, dignities on Concini, who ruined her; the king made Vitry *maréchal* of France for an assassination: while I have left in obscurity, in poverty, the noble D'Artagnan, who saved me!"

And running to a table, on which were paper, pens and ink, she hastily began to write.

CHAPTER L.

THE INTERVIEW.

It had been D'Artagnan's practice, ever since the riots, to sleep in the same room as Porthos, and on this eventful morning he was still there, sleeping, and dreaming that a yellow cloud had overspread the sky and was raining gold pieces into his hat, which he held out till it was overflowing with pistoles. As for Porthos, he dreamed that the panels of his carriage were not capacious enough to contain the armorial bearings he had ordered to be painted on them. They were both aroused at seven o'clock by the entrance of an unliveried servant, who brought a letter for D'Artagnan.

"From whom?" asked the Gascon.

"From the queen," replied the servant.

"Ho!" said Porthos, raising himself in his bed; "what does she say?"

D'Artagnan requested the servant to wait in the next room and when the door was closed he sprang up from his bed and read rapidly, whilst Porthos looked at him with starting eyes, not daring to ask a single question.

"Friend Porthos," said D'Artagnan, handing the letter to him, "this time, at least, you are sure of your title of baron, and I of my captaincy. Read for yourself and judge."

Porthos took the letter and with a trembling voice read the following words:

"The queen wishes to speak to Monsieur d'Artagnan, who must follow the bearer."

"Well!" exclaimed Porthos; "I see nothing in that very extraordinary."

"But I see much that is very extraordinary in it," replied

D'Artagnan. "It is evident, by their sending for me, that matters are becoming complicated. Just reflect a little what an agitation the queen's mind must be in for her to have remembered me after twenty years."

"It is true," said Porthos.

"Sharpen your sword, baron, load your pistols, and give some corn to the horses, for I will answer for it, something lightning-like will happen ere to-morrow."

"But, stop; do you think it can be a trap that they are laying for us?" suggested Porthos, incessantly thinking how his greatness must be irksome to inferior people.

"If it is a snare," replied D'Artagnan, "I shall scent it out, be assured. If Mazarin is an Italian, I am a Gascon."

And D'Artagnan dressed himself in an instant.

Whilst Porthos, still in bed, was hooking on his cloak for him, a second knock at the door was heard.

"Come in," exclaimed D'Artagnan; and another servant entered.

"From His Eminence, Cardinal Mazarin," presenting a letter.

D'Artagnan looked at Porthos.

"A complicated affair," said Porthos; "where will you begin?"

"It is arranged capitally; his eminence expects me in half an hour."

"Good."

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, turning to the servant, "tell his eminence that in half an hour I shall be at his command."

"It is very fortunate," resumed the Gascon, when the valet had retired, "that he did not meet the other one."

"Do you not think that they have sent for you, both for the same thing?"

"I do not think it, I am certain of it."

"Quick, quick, D'Artagnan. Remember that the queen awaits you, and after the queen, the cardinal, and after the cardinal, myself."

D'Artagnan summoned Anne of Austria's servant and signified that he was ready to follow him into the queen's presence.

The servant conducted him by the Rue des Petits Champs and turning to the left entered the little garden gate leading into the Rue Richelieu; then they gained the private staircase and D'Artagnan was ushered into the oratory. A certain emotion, for which he could not account, made the lieutenant's heart beat: he had no longer the assurance of youth; experience had taught him the importance of past events. Formerly he would have approached the queen as a young man who bends before a woman; but now it was a different thing; he answered her summons as an humble soldier obeys an illustrious general.

The silence of the oratory was at last disturbed by the slight rustling of silk, and D'Artagnan started when he perceived the tapestry raised by a white hand, which, by its form, its color and its beauty he recognized as that royal hand which had one day been presented to him to kiss. The queen entered.

"It is you, Monsieur d'Artagnan," she said, fixing a gaze full of melancholy interest on the countenance of the officer, "and I know you well. Look at me well in your turn. I am the queen; do you recognize me?"

"No, madame," replied D'Artagnan.

"But are you no longer aware," continued Anne, giving that sweet expression to her voice which she could do at will, "that in former days the queen had once need of a young, brave and devoted cavalier—that she found this cavalier—and that, although he might have thought that she had forgotten him, she had kept a place for him in the depths of her heart?"

"No, madame, I was ignorant of that," said the musketeer.

"So much the worse, sir," said Anne of Austria; "so much the worse, at least for the queen, for to-day she has need of the same courage and the same devotion."

"What!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "does the queen, sur-

rounded as she is by such devoted servants, such wise counselors, men, in short, so great by merit or position — does she deign to cast her eyes on an obscure soldier ? ”

Anne understood this covert reproach and was more moved than irritated by it. She had many a time felt humiliated by the self-sacrifice and disinterestedness shown by the Gascon gentleman. She had allowed herself to be exceeded in generosity.

“ All that you tell me of those by whom I am surrounded, Monsieur d’Artagnan, is doubtless true,” said the queen, “ but I have confidence in you alone. I know that you belong to the cardinal, but belong to me as well, and I will take upon myself the making of your fortune. Come, will you do to-day what formerly the gentleman you do not know did for the queen ? ”

“ I will do everything your majesty commands,” replied D’Artagnan.

The queen reflected for a moment and then, seeing the cautious demeanor of the musketeer :

“ Perhaps you like repose ? ” she said.

“ I do not know, for I have never had it, madame.”

“ Have you any friends ? ”

“ I had three, two of whom have left Paris, to go I know not where. One alone is left to me, but he is one of those known, I believe, to the cavalier of whom your majesty did me the honor to speak.”

“ Very good,” said the queen ; “ you and your friend are worth an army.”

“ What am I to do, madame ? ”

“ Return at five o’clock and I will tell you ; but do not breathe to a living soul, sir, the rendezvous which I give you.”

“ No, madame.”

“ Swear it upon the cross.”

“ Madame, I have never been false to my word ; when I say I will not do a thing, I mean it.”

The queen, although astonished at this language, to which

she was not accustomed from her courtiers, argued from it a happy omen of the zeal with which D'Artagnan would serve her in the accomplishment of her project. It was one of the Gascon's artifices to hide his deep cunning occasionally under an appearance of rough loyalty.

"Has the queen any further commands for me now?" asked D'Artagnan.

"No, sir," replied Anne of Austria, "and you may retire until the time that I mentioned to you."

D'Artagnan bowed and went out.

"*Diable!*" he exclaimed when the door was shut, "they seem to have the greatest need of me just now."

Then, as the half hour had already glided by, he crossed the gallery and knocked at the cardinal's door.

Bernouin introduced him.

"I come for your commands, my lord," he said.

And according to his custom D'Artagnan glanced rapidly around and remarked that Mazarin had a sealed letter before him. But it was so placed on the desk that he could not see to whom it was addressed.

"You come from the queen?" said Mazarin, looking fixedly at D'Artagnan.

"I! my lord — who told you that?"

"Nobody, but I know it."

"I regret infinitely to tell you, my lord, that you are mistaken," replied the Gascon, impudently, firm to the promise he had just made to Anne of Austria.

"I opened the door of the ante-room myself and I saw you enter at the end of the corridor."

"Because I was shown up the private stairs."

"How so?"

"I know not; it must have been a mistake."

Mazarin was aware that it was not easy to make D'Artagnan reveal anything he was desirous of hiding, so he gave up, for the time, the discovery of the mystery the Gascon was concealing.

"Let us speak of my affairs," said Mazarin, "since you

will tell me naught of yours. Are you fond of traveling?"

"My life has been passed on the high road."

"Would anything retain you particularly in Paris?"

"Nothing but an order from a superior would retain me in Paris."

"Very well. Here is a letter, which must be taken to its address."

"To its address, my lord? But it has none."

In fact, the side of the letter opposite the seal was blank.

"I must tell you," resumed Mazarin, "that it is in a double envelope."

"I understand; and I am to take off the first one when I have reached a certain place?"

"Just so; take it and go. You have a friend, Monsieur du Vallon, whom I like much; let him accompany you."

"The devil!" said D'Artagnan to himself. "He knows that we overheard his conversation yesterday and he wants to get us away from Paris."

"Do you hesitate?" asked Mazarin.

"No, my lord, and I will set out at once. There is one thing only which I must request."

"What is it? Speak."

"That your eminence will go at once to the queen."

"What for?"

"Merely to say these words: 'I am going to send Monsieur d'Artagnan away and I wish him to set out directly.'"

"I told you," said Mazarin, "that you had seen the queen."

"I had the honor of saying to your eminence that there had been some mistake."

"What is the meaning of that?"

"May I venture to repeat my prayer to your eminence?"

"Very well; I will go. Wait here for me." And looking attentively around him, to see if he had left any of his keys in his closets, Mazarin went out. Ten minutes elapsed, during which D'Artagnan made every effort to read through the first envelope what was written on the second. But he did not succeed.

Mazarin returned, pale, and evidently thoughtful. He seated himself at his desk and D'Artagnan proceeded to examine his face, as he had just examined the letter he held, but the envelope which covered his countenance appeared as impenetrable as that which covered the letter.

"Ah!" thought the Gascon; "he looks displeased. Can it be with me? He meditates. Is it about sending me to the Bastile? All very fine, my lord, but at the very first hint you give of such a thing I will strangle you and become Frondist. I should be carried home in triumph like Monsieur Broussel and Athos would proclaim me the French Brutus. It would be exceedingly droll."

The Gascon, with his vivid imagination, had already seen the advantage to be derived from his situation. Mazarin gave, however, no order of the kind, but on the contrary began to be insinuating.

"You were right," he said, "my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan, and you cannot set out yet. I beg you to return me that dispatch."

D'Artagnan obeyed, and Mazarin ascertained that the seal was intact.

"I shall want you this evening," he said. "Return in two hours."

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "I have an appointment in two hours which I cannot miss."

"Do not be uneasy," said Mazarin; "it is the same."

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan; "I fancied it was so."

"Return, then, at five o'clock and bring that worthy Monsieur du Vallon with you. Only, leave him in the ante-room, as I wish to speak to you alone."

D'Artagnan bowed, and thought: "Both at the same hour; both commands alike; both at the Palais Royal. Monsieur de Gondy would pay a hundred thousand francs for such a secret!"

"You are thoughtful," said Mazarin, uneasily.

"Yes, I was thinking whether we ought to come armed or not."

“ Armed to the teeth ! ” replied Mazarin.

“ Very well, my lord ; it shall be so.”

D'Artagnan saluted, went out and hastened to repeat to his friend Mazarin's flattering promises, which gave Porthos an indescribable happiness.

CHAPTER LI.

THE FLIGHT.

WHEN D'Artagnan returned to the Palais Royal at five o'clock, it presented, in spite of the excitement which reigned in the town, a spectacle of the greatest rejoicing. Nor was that surprising. The queen had restored Broussel and Blancmesnil to the people and had therefore nothing to fear, since the people had nothing more just then to ask for. The return, also, of the conqueror of Lens was the pretext for giving a grand banquet. The princes and princesses were invited and their carriages had crowded the court since noon; then after dinner the queen was to have a play in her apartment. Anne of Austria had never appeared more brilliant than on that day — radiant with grace and wit. Mazarin disappeared as they rose from table. He found D'Artagnan waiting for him already at his post in the ante-room. The cardinal advanced to him with a smile and taking him by the hand led him into his study.

"My dear M. d'Artagnan," said the minister, sitting down, "I am about to give you the greatest proof of confidence that a minister can give an officer."

"I hope," said D'Artagnan, bowing, "that you give it, my lord, without hesitation and with the conviction that I am worthy of it."

"More worthy than any one in Paris, my dear friend; therefore I apply to you. We are about to leave this evening," continued Mazarin. "My dear M. d'Artagnan, the welfare of the state is deposited in your hands." He paused.

"Explain yourself, my lord; I am listening."

"The queen has resolved to make a little excursion with the king to Saint Germain."

"Aha!" said D'Artagnan, "that is to say, the queen wishes to leave Paris."

"A woman's caprice — you understand."

"Yes, I understand — perfectly," said D'Artagnan.

"It was for this she summoned you this morning and that she told you to return at five o'clock."

"Was it worth while to wish me to swear this morning that I would mention the appointment to no one?" muttered D'Artagnan. "Oh, women! women! whether queens or not, they are always the same."

"Do you disapprove of this journey, my dear M. d'Artagnan?" asked Mazarin, anxiously.

"I, my lord?" said D'Artagnan; "why should I?"

"Because you shrug your shoulders."

"It is a way I have of speaking to myself. I neither approve nor disapprove, my lord; I merely await your commands."

"Good; it is you, accordingly, that I have pitched upon to conduct the king and the queen to Saint Germain."

"Liar!" thought D'Artagnan.

"You see, therefore," continued the cardinal, perceiving D'Artagnan's composure, "that, as I have told you, the welfare of the state is placed in your hands."

"Yes, my lord, and I feel the whole responsibility of such a charge."

"You accept, however?"

"I always accept."

"Do you think the thing possible?"

"Everything is possible."

"Shall you be attacked on the road?"

"Probably."

"And what will you do in that case?"

"I shall pass through those who attack me."

"And suppose you cannot pass through them?"

"So much the worse for them; I shall pass over them."

"And you will place the king and queen in safety also, at Saint Germain?"

"Yes."

"On your life?"

"On my life."

"You are a hero, my friend," said Mazarin, gazing at the musketeer with admiration.

D'Artagnan smiled.

"And I?" asked Mazarin, after a moment's silence.

"How? and you, my lord?"

"If I wish to leave?"

"That would be much more difficult."

"Why so?"

"Your eminence might be recognized."

"Even under this disguise?" asked Mazarin, raising a cloak which covered an arm-chair, upon which lay a complete dress for an officer, of pearl-gray and red, entirely embroidered with silver.

"If your eminence is disguised it will be almost easy."

"Ah!" said Mazarin, breathing more freely.

"But it will be necessary for your eminence to do what the other day you declared you should have done in our place — cry, 'Down with Mazarin!'"

"I will: 'Down with Mazarin.'"

"In French, in good French, my lord; take care of your accent; they killed six thousand Angevins in Sicily because they pronounced Italian badly. Take care that the French do not take their revenge on you for the Sicilian vespers."

"I will do my best."

"The streets are full of armed men," continued D'Artagnan. "Are you sure that no one is aware of the queen's project?"

Mazarin reflected.

"This affair would give a fine opportunity for a traitor, my lord; the chance of being attacked would be an excuse for everything."

Mazarin shuddered, but he reflected that a man who had the least intention to betray would not warn first.

"And therefore," added he, quietly, "I have not confidence

in every one; the proof of which is, that I have fixed upon you to escort me."

"Shall you not go with the queen?"

"No," replied Mazarin.

"Then you will start after the queen?"

"No," said Mazarin again.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, who began to understand.

"Yes," continued the cardinal. "I have my plan. With the queen I double her risk; after the queen her departure would double mine; then, the court once safe, I might be forgotten. The great are often ungrateful."

"Very true," said D'Artagnan, fixing his eyes, in spite of himself, on the queen's diamond, which Mazarin wore on his finger. Mazarin followed the direction of his eyes and gently turned the hoop of the ring inside.

"I wish," he said, with his cunning smile, "to prevent them from being ungrateful to me."

"It is but Christian charity," replied D'Artagnan, "not to lead one's neighbors into temptation."

"It is exactly for that reason," said Mazarin, "that I wish to start *before* them."

D'Artagnan smiled — he was just the man to understand the astute Italian. Mazarin saw the smile and profited by the moment.

"You will begin, therefore, by taking me first out of Paris, will you not, my dear M. d'Artagnan?"

"A difficult commission, my lord," replied D'Artagnan, resuming his serious manner.

"But," said Mazarin, "you did not make so many difficulties with regard to the king and queen."

"The king and the queen are my king and queen," replied the musketeer; "my life is theirs and I must give it for them. If they ask it what have I to say?"

"That is true," murmured Mazarin, in a low tone, "but as thy life is not mine I suppose I must buy it, must I not?" and sighing deeply he began to turn the hoop of his ring outside again. D'Artagnan smiled. These two men met at one

point and that was, cunning; had they been actuated equally by courage, the one would have done great things for the other.

"But, also," said Mazarin, "you must understand that if I ask this service from you it is with the intention of being grateful."

"Is it still only an intention, your eminence?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Stay," said Mazarin, drawing the ring from his finger, "my dear D'Artagnan, there is a diamond which belonged to you formerly, it is but just it should return to you; take it, I pray."

D'Artagnan spared Mazarin the trouble of insisting, and after looking to see if the stone was the same and assuring himself of the purity of its water, he took it and passed it on his finger with indescribable pleasure.

"I valued it much," said Mazarin, giving a last look at it; "nevertheless, I give it to you with great pleasure."

"And I, my lord," said D'Artagnan, "accept it as it is given. Come, let us speak of your little affairs. You wish to leave before everybody and at what hour?"

"At ten o'clock."

"And the queen, at what time is it her wish to start?"

"At midnight."

"Then it is possible. I can get you out of Paris and leave you beyond the *barrière*, and can return for her."

"Capital; but how will you get me out of Paris?"

"Oh! as to that, you must leave it to me."

"I give you absolute power, therefore; take as large an escort as you like."

D'Artagnan shook his head.

"It seems to me, however," said Mazarin, "the safest method."

"Yes, for you, my lord, but not for the queen; you must leave it to me and give me the entire direction of the undertaking."

"Nevertheless ——"

"Or find some one else," continued D'Artagnan, turning his back.

"Oh!" muttered Mazarin, "I do believe he is going off with the diamond! M. d'Artagnan, my dear M. d'Artagnan," he called out in a coaxing voice, "will you answer for everything?"

"I will answer for *nothing*. I will do my best."

"Well, then, let us go — I must trust to you."

"It is very fortunate," said D'Artagnan to himself.

"You will be here at half-past nine."

"And I shall find your eminence ready?"

"Certainly, quite ready."

"Well, then, it is a settled thing; and now, my lord, will you obtain for me an audience with the queen?"

"For what purpose?"

"I wish to receive her majesty's commands from her own lips."

"She desired me to give them to you."

"She may have forgotten something."

"You really wish to see her?"

"It is indispensable, my lord."

Mazarin hesitated for one instant, but D'Artagnan was firm.

"Come, then," said the minister; "I will conduct you to her, but remember, not one word of our conversation."

"What has passed between us concerns ourselves alone, my lord," replied D'Artagnan.

"Swear to be mute."

"I never swear, my lord, I say yes or no; and, as I am a gentleman, I keep my word."

"Come, then, I see that I must trust unreservedly to you."

"Believe me, my lord, it will be your best plan."

"Come," said Mazarin, conducting D'Artagnan into the queen's oratory and desiring him to wait there. He did not wait long, for in five minutes the queen entered in full gala costume. Thus dressed she scarcely appeared thirty-five years of age. She was still exceedingly handsome.

"It is you, Monsieur d'Artagnan," she said, smiling graciously; "I thank you for having insisted on seeing me."

"I ought to ask your majesty's pardon, but I wished to receive your commands from your own mouth."

"Do you accept the commission which I have intrusted to you?"

"With gratitude."

"Very well, be here at midnight."

"I will not fail."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," continued the queen, "I know your disinterestedness too well to speak of my own gratitude at such a moment; but I swear to you that I shall not forget this second service as I forgot the first."

"Your majesty is free to forget or to remember, as it pleases you; and I know not what you mean," said D'Artagnan, bowing.

"Go, sir," said the queen, with her most bewitching smile, "go and return at midnight."

And D'Artagnan retired, but as he passed out he glanced at the curtain through which the queen had entered and at the bottom of the tapestry he remarked the tip of a velvet slipper.

"Good," thought he; "Mazarin has been listening to discover whether I betrayed him. In truth, that Italian puppet does not deserve the services of an honest man."

D'Artagnan was not less exact to his appointment and at half-past nine o'clock he entered the ante-room.

He found the cardinal dressed as an officer and he looked very well in that costume, which, as we have already said, he wore elegantly; only he was very pale and trembled slightly.

"Quite alone?" he asked.

"Yes, my lord."

"And that worthy Monsieur du Vallon, are we not to enjoy his society?"

"Certainly, my lord, he is waiting in his carriage at the gate of the garden of the Palais Royal."

"And we start in his carriage, then?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And with us no other escort but you two?"

"Is it not enough? One of us would suffice."

"Really, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the cardinal, "your coolness startles me."

"I should have thought, on the contrary, that it ought to have inspired you with confidence."

"And Bernouin — do I not take him with me?"

"There is no room for him, he will rejoin your eminence."

"Let us go," said Mazarin, "since everything must be done as you wish."

"My lord, there is time to draw back," said D'Artagnan, "and your eminence is perfectly free."

"Not at all, not at all," said Mazarin; "let us be off."

And so they descended the private stair, Mazarin leaning on the arm of D'Artagnan and the musketeer felt trembling. At last, after crossing the courts of the Palais Royal, where there still remained some of the conveyances of late guests, they entered the garden and reached the little gate. Mazarin attempted to open it by a key which he took from his pocket, but with such shaking fingers that he could not find the keyhole.

"Give it to me," said D'Artagnan, who when the gate was open deposited the key in his pocket, reckoning upon returning by that gate.

The steps were already down and the door open. Musqueton stood at the door and Porthos was inside the carriage.

"Mount, my lord," said D'Artagnan to Mazarin, who sprang into the carriage without waiting for a second bidding. D'Artagnan followed him, and Musqueton, having closed the door, mounted behind the carriage with many groans. He had made some difficulties about going, under pretext that he still suffered from his wound, but D'Artagnan had said to him:

"Remain if you like, my dear Monsieur Mouston, but I

warn you that Paris will be burnt down to-night;" upon which Musqueton had declared, without asking anything further, that he was ready to follow his master and Monsieur d'Artagnan to the end of the world.

The carriage started at a measured pace, without betraying by the slightest sign that it contained people in a hurry. The cardinal wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and looked around him. On his left was Porthos, whilst D'Artagnan was on his right; each guarded a door and served as a rampart to him on either side. Before him, on the front seat, lay two pairs of pistols — one in front of Porthos and the other of D'Artagnan. About a hundred paces from the Palais Royal a patrol stopped the carriage.

"Who goes?" asked the captain.

"Mazarin!" replied D'Artagnan, bursting into a laugh. The cardinal's hair stood on end. But the joke appeared an excellent one to the citizens, who, seeing the conveyance without escort and unarmed, would never have believed in the possibility of so great an imprudence.

"A good journey to ye!" they cried, allowing it to pass.

"Hem!" said D'Artagnan, "what does my lord think of that reply?"

"Man of talent!" cried Mazarin.

"In truth," said Porthos, "I understand; but now ——"

About the middle of the Rue des Petits Champs they were stopped by a second patrol.

"Who goes there?" inquired the captain of the patrol.

"Keep back, my lord," said D'Artagnan. And Mazarin buried himself so far behind the two friends that he disappeared, completely hidden between them.

"Who goes there?" cried the same voice, impatiently, whilst D'Artagnan perceived that they had rushed to the horses' heads. But putting his head out of the carriage:

"Eh! Planchet," said he.

The chief approached, and it was indeed Planchet; D'Artagnan had recognized the voice of his old servant.

"How, sir!" said Planchet, "is it you?"

"Eh! *mon Dieu!* yes, my good friend, this worthy Porthos has just received a sword wound and I am taking him to his country house at Saint Cloud."

"Oh! really," said Planchet.

"Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "if you can still speak, say a word, my dear Porthos, to this good Planchet."

"Planchet, my friend," said Porthos, in a melancholy voice, "I am very ill; should you meet a doctor you will do me a favor by sending him to me."

"Oh! good Heaven," said Planchet, "what a misfortune! and how did it happen?"

"I will tell you all about it," replied Musqueton.

Porthos uttered a deep groan.

"Make way for us, Planchet," said D'Artagnan in a whisper to him, "or he will not arrive alive; the lungs are attacked, my friend."

Planchet shook his head with the air of a man who says, "In that case things look ill." Then he exclaimed, turning to his men:

"Let them pass; they are friends."

The carriage resumed its course, and Mazarin, who had held his breath, ventured to breathe again.

"*Bricconi!*" muttered he.

A few steps in advance of the gate of Saint Honoré they met a third troop; this latter party was composed of ill-looking fellows, who resembled bandits more than anything else; they were the men of the beggar of Saint Eustache.

"Attention, Porthos!" cried D'Artagnan.

Porthos placed his hand on the pistols.

"What is it?" asked Mazarin.

"My lord, I think we are in bad company."

A man advanced to the door with a kind of scythe in his hand. "*Qui vive?*" he asked.

"Eh, rascal!" said D'Artagnan, "do you not recognize his highness the prince's carriage?"

"Prince or not," said the man, "open. We are here to guard the gate and no one whom we do not know shall pass."

"What is to be done?" said Porthos.

"*Pardieu!* pass," replied D'Artagnan.

"But *how?*" asked Mazarin.

"Through or over; coachman, gallop on."

The coachman raised his whip.

"Not a step further," said the man, who appeared to be the captain, "or I will hamstring your horses."

"*Peste!*" said Porthos, "it would be a pity; animals which cost me a hundred pistoles each."

"I will pay you two hundred for them," said Mazarin.

"Yes, but when once they are hamstrung, our necks will be strung next."

"If one of them comes to my side," asked Porthos, "must I kill him?"

"Yes, by a blow of your fist, if you can; we will not fire but at the last extremity."

"I can do it," said Porthos.

"Come and open, then!" cried D'Artagnan to the man with the scythe, taking one of the pistols up by the muzzle and preparing to strike with the handle. And as the man approached, D'Artagnan, in order to have more freedom for his actions, leaned half out of the door; his eyes were fixed upon those of the mendicant, which were lighted up by a lantern. Without doubt he recognized D'Artagnan, for he became deadly pale; doubtless the musketeer knew him, for his hair stood up on his head.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!" he cried, falling back a step; "it is Monsieur d'Artagnan! *let him pass.*"

D'Artagnan was perhaps about to reply, when a blow, similar to that of a mallet falling on the head of an ox, was heard. The noise was caused by Porthos, who had just knocked down his man.

D'Artagnan turned around and saw the unfortunate man upon his back about four paces off.

"*Sdeath!*" cried he to the coachman. "Spur your horses! whip! get on!"

The coachman bestowed a heavy blow of the whip upon

his horses; the noble animals bounded forward; then cries of men who were knocked down were heard; then a double concussion was felt, and two of the wheels seemed to pass over a round and flexible body. There was a moment's silence, then the carriage cleared the gate.

"To Cours la Reine!" cried D'Artagnan to the coachman; then turning to Mazarin he said, "Now, my lord, you can say five *paters* and five *aves*, in thanks to Heaven for your deliverance. You are safe — you are free."

Mazarin replied only by a groan; he could not believe in such a miracle. Five minutes later the carriage stopped, having reached Cours la Reine.

"Is my lord pleased with his escort?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Enchanted, monsieur," said Mazarin, venturing his head out of one of the windows; "and now do as much for the queen."

"It will not be so difficult," replied D'Artagnan, springing to the ground. "Monsieur du Vallon, I commend his eminence to your care."

"Be quite at ease," said Porthos, holding out his hand, which D'Artagnan took and shook in his.

"Oh!" cried Porthos, as if in pain.

D'Artagnan looked with surprise at his friend.

"What is the matter, then?" he asked.

"I think I have sprained my wrist," said Porthos.

"The devil! why, you strike like a blind or a deaf man."

"It was necessary; my man was going to fire a pistol at me; but you — how did you get rid of yours?"

"Oh, mine," replied D'Artagnan, "was not a man."

"What was it then?"

"It was an apparition."

"And ——"

"I charmed it away."

Without further explanation D'Artagnan took the pistols which were upon the front seat, placed them in his belt, wrapped himself in his cloak, and not wishing to enter by the same gate as that through which they had left, he took his way toward the Richelieu gate.

CHAPTER LII.

THE CARRIAGE OF MONSIEUR LE COADJUTEUR.

INSTEAD of returning, then, by the Saint Honoré gate, D'Artagnan, who had time before him, walked around and re-entered by the Porte Richelieu. He was approached to be examined, and when it was discovered, by his plumed hat and his laced coat, that he was an officer of the musketeers, he was surrounded, with the intention of making him cry, "Down with Mazarin!" The demonstration did not fail to make him uneasy at first; but when he discovered what it meant, he shouted it in such a voice that even the most exacting were satisfied. He walked down the Rue Richelieu, meditating how he should carry off the queen in her turn, for to take her in a carriage bearing the arms of France was not to be thought of, when he perceived an equipage standing at the door of the hotel belonging to Madame de Guémenée.

He was struck by a sudden idea.

"Ah, *pardieu!*" he exclaimed; "that would be fair play."

And approaching the carriage, he examined the arms on the panels and the livery of the coachman on his box. This scrutiny was so much the more easy, the coachman being sound asleep.

"It is, in truth, monsieur le coadjuteur's carriage," said D'Artagnan; "upon my honor I begin to think that Heaven favors us."

He mounted noiselessly into the chariot and pulled the silk cord which was attached to the coachman's little finger

"To the Palais Royal," he called out.

The coachman awoke with a start and drove off in the

direction he was desired, never doubting but that the order had come from his master. The porter at the palace was about to close the gates, but seeing such a handsome equipage he fancied that it was some visit of importance and the carriage was allowed to pass and to stop beneath the porch. It was then only the coachman perceived the grooms were not behind the vehicle; he fancied monsieur le coadjuteur had sent them back, and without dropping the reins he sprang from his box to open the door. D'Artagnan, in his turn, sprang to the ground, and just at the moment when the coachman, alarmed at not seeing his master, fell back a step, he seized him by his collar with the left, whilst with the right hand he placed the muzzle of a pistol at his breast.

"Pronounce one single word," muttered D'Artagnan, "and you are a dead man."

The coachman perceived at once, by the expression of the man who thus addressed him, that he had fallen into a trap, and he remained with his mouth wide open and his eyes portentously staring.

Two musketeers were pacing the court, to whom D'Artagnan called by their names.

"Monsieur de Bellière," said he to one of them, "do me the favor to take the reins from the hands of this worthy man, mount upon the box and drive to the door of the private stair, and wait for me there; it is an affair of importance on the service of the king."

The musketeer, who knew that his lieutenant was incapable of jesting with regard to the service, obeyed without a word, although he thought the order strange. Then turning toward the second musketeer, D'Artagnan said:

"Monsieur du Verger, help me to place this man in a place of safety."

The musketeer, thinking that his lieutenant had just arrested some prince in disguise, bowed, and drawing his sword, signified that he was ready. D'Artagnan mounted the staircase, followed by his prisoner, who in his turn was followed by the soldier, and entered Mazarin's ante-room.

Bernouin was waiting there, impatient for news of his master.

"Well, sir?" he said.

"Everything goes on capitally, my dear Monsieur Bernouin, but here is a man whom I must beg you to put in a safe place."

"Where, then, sir?"

"Where you like, provided that the place which you shall choose has iron shutters secured by padlocks and a door that can be locked."

"We have that, sir," replied Bernouin; and the poor coachman was conducted to a closet, the windows of which were barred and which looked very much like a prison.

"And now, my good friend," said D'Artagnan to him, "I must invite you to deprive yourself, for my sake, of your hat and cloak."

The coachman, as we can well understand, made no resistance; in fact, he was so astonished at what had happened to him that he stammered and reeled like a drunken man; D'Artagnan deposited his clothes under the arm of one of the valets.

"And now, Monsieur du Verger," he said, "shut yourself up with this man until Monsieur Bernouin returns to open the door. The duty will be tolerably long and not very amusing, I know; but," added he, seriously, "you understand, it is on the king's service."

"At your command, lieutenant," replied the musketeer, who saw the business was a serious one.

"By-the-bye," continued D'Artagnan, "should this man attempt to fly or to call out, pass your sword through his body."

The musketeer signified by a nod that these commands should be obeyed to the letter, and D'Artagnan went out, followed by Bernouin. Midnight struck.

"Lead me into the queen's oratory," said D'Artagnan, "announce to her I am here, and put this parcel, with a well-loaded musket, under the seat of the carriage which is waiting at the foot of the private stair."

Bernouin conducted D'Artagnan to the oratory, where he sat down pensively. Everything had gone on as usual at the Palais Royal. As we said before, by ten o'clock almost all the guests had dispersed; those who were to fly with the court had the word of command and they were each severally desired to be from twelve o'clock to one at Cours la Reine.

At ten o'clock Anne of Austria had entered the king's room. Monsieur had just retired and the youthful Louis, remaining the last, was amusing himself by placing some lead soldiers in a line of battle, a game which delighted him much. Two royal pages were playing with him.

"Laporte," said the queen, "it is time for his majesty to go to bed."

The king asked to remain up, having, he said, no wish to sleep; but the queen was firm.

"Are you not going to-morrow morning at six o'clock, Louis, to bathe at Conflans? I think you wished to do so of your own accord?"

"You are right, madame," said the king, "and I am ready to retire to my room when you have kissed me. Laporte, give the light to Monsieur the Chevalier de Coislin."

The queen touched with her lips the white, smooth brow the royal child presented to her with a gravity which already partook of etiquette.

"Go to sleep soon, Louis," said the queen, "for you must be awakened very early."

"I will do my best to obey you, madame," said the youthful king, "but I have no inclination to sleep."

"Laporte," said Anne of Austria, in an undertone, "find some very dull book to read to his majesty, but do not undress yourself."

The king went out, accompanied by the Chevalier de Coislin, bearing the candlestick, and then the queen returned to her own apartment. Her ladies — that is to say Madame de Brégy, Mademoiselle de Beaumont, Madame de Motteville, and Socratine, her sister, so called on account of her sense — had just brought into her dressing-room the remains of the

dinner, on which, according to her usual custom, she supped. The queen then gave her orders, spoke of a banquet which the Marquis de Villequier was to give to her on the day after the morrow, indicated the persons she would admit to the honor of partaking of it, announced another visit on the following day to Val-de-Grace, where she intended to pay her devotions, and gave her commands to her senior valet to accompany her. When the ladies had finished their supper the queen feigned extreme fatigue and passed into her bedroom. Madame de Motteville, who was on especial duty that evening, followed to aid and undress her. The queen then began to read and after conversing with her affectionately for a few minutes, dismissed her.

It was at this moment D'Artagnan entered the courtyard of the palace, in the coadjutor's carriage, and a few seconds later the carriages of the ladies-in-waiting drove out and the gates were shut after them.

A few minutes after twelve o'clock Bernouin knocked at the queen's bedroom door, having come by the cardinal's secret corridor. Anne of Austria opened the door to him herself. She was dressed, that is to say, in *dishabille*, wrapped in a long, warm dressing-gown.

"It is you, Bernouin," she said. "Is Monsieur d'Artagnan there?"

"Yes, madame, in your oratory. He is waiting till your majesty is ready."

"I am. Go and tell Laporte to wake and dress the king and then pass on to the Maréchal de Villeroy and summon him to me."

Bernouin bowed and retired.

The queen entered her oratory, which was lighted by a single lamp of Venetian crystal. She saw D'Artagnan, who stood expecting her.

"Is it you?" she said.

"Yes, madame."

"Are you ready?"

"I am."

"And his eminence, the cardinal?"

"Has got off without any accident. He is awaiting your majesty at Cours la Reine."

"But in what carriage do we start?"

"I have provided for everything; a carriage below is waiting for your majesty."

"Let us go to the king."

D'Artagnan bowed and followed the queen. The young Louis was already dressed, with the exception of his shoes and doublet; he had allowed himself to be dressed, in great astonishment, overwhelming Laporte with questions, who replied only in these words, "Sire, it is by the queen's commands."

The bedclothes were thrown back, exposing the king's bed linen, which was so worn that here and there holes could be seen. It was one of the results of Mazarin's niggardliness.

"The queen entered and D'Artagnan remained at the door. As soon as the child perceived the queen he escaped from Laporte and ran to meet her. Anne then motioned to D'Artagnan to approach and he obeyed.

"My son," said Anne of Austria, pointing to the musketeer, calm, standing uncovered, "here is Monsieur d'Artagnan, who is as brave as one of those ancient heroes of whom you like so much to hear from my women. Remember his name well and look at him well, that his face may not be forgotten, for this evening he is going to render us a great service."

The young king looked at the officer with his large-formed eye, and repeated:

"Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"That is it, my son."

The young king slowly raised his little hand and held it out to the musketeer; the latter bent on his knee and kissed it.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," repeated Louis; "very well, madame."

At this moment they were startled by a noise as if a tumult were approaching.

"What is that?" exclaimed the queen.

"Oh, oh!" replied D'Artagnan, straining both at the same time his quick ear and his intelligent glance, "it is the murmur of the populace in revolution."

"We must fly," said the queen.

"Your majesty has given me the control of this business; we had better wait and see what they want."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!"

"I will answer for everything."

Nothing is so catching as confidence. The queen, full of energy and courage, was quickly alive to these two virtues in others.

"Do as you like," she said, "I rely upon you."

"Will your majesty permit me to give orders in your name throughout this business?"

"Command, sir."

"What do the people want this time?" demanded the king.

"We are about to ascertain, sire," replied D'Artagnan, as he rapidly left the room.

The tumult continued to increase and seemed to surround the Palais Royal entirely. Cries were heard from the interior, of which they could not comprehend the sense. It was evident that there was clamor and sedition.

The king, half dressed, the queen and Laporte remained each in the same state and almost in the same place, where they were listening and waiting. Comminges, who was on guard that night at the Palais Royal, ran in. He had about two hundred men in the courtyards and stables, and he placed them at the queen's disposal.

"Well," asked Anne of Austria, when D'Artagnan reappeared, "what does it mean?"

"It means, madame, that the report has spread that the queen has left the Palais Royal, carrying off the king, and the people ask to have proof to the contrary, or threaten to demolish the Palais Royal."

"Oh, this time it is too much!" exclaimed the queen, "and I will prove to them I have not left."

D'Artagnan saw from the expression of the queen's face that she was about to issue some violent command. He approached her and said in a low voice:

"Has your majesty still confidence in me?"

This voice startled her. "Yes, sir," she replied, "every confidence; speak."

"Will the queen deign to follow my advice?"

"Speak."

"Let your majesty dismiss M. de Comminges and desire him to shut himself up with his men in the guardhouse and in the stables."

Comminges glanced at D'Artagnan with the envious look with which every courtier sees a new favorite spring up.

"You hear, Comminges?" said the queen.

D'Artagnan went up to him; with his usual quickness he caught the anxious glance.

"Monsieur de Comminges," he said, "pardon me; we both are servants of the queen, are we not? It is my turn to be of use to her; do not envy me this happiness."

Comminges bowed and left.

"Come," said D'Artagnan to himself, "I have got one more enemy."

"And now," said the queen, addressing D'Artagnan, "what is to be done? for you hear that, instead of becoming calmer, the noise increases."

"Madame," said D'Artagnan, "the people want to see the king and they must see him."

"What! *must* see him! Where — on the balcony?"

"Not at all, madame, but here, sleeping in his bed."

"Oh, your majesty," exclaimed Laporte, "Monsieur d'Artagnan is right."

The queen became thoughtful and smiled, like a woman to whom duplicity is no stranger.

"Without doubt," she murmured.

"Monsieur Laporte," said D'Artagnan, "go and announce

to the people through the grating that they are going to be satisfied and that in five minutes they shall not only see the king, but they shall see him in bed; add that the king sleeps and that the queen begs that they will keep silence, so as not to awaken him."

"But not every one; a deputation of two or four people."

"Every one, madame."

"But reflect, they will keep us here till daybreak."

"It shall take but a quarter of an hour, I answer for everything, madame; believe me, I know the people; they are like a great child, who only wants humoring. Before the sleeping king they will be mute, gentle and timid as lambs."

"Go, Laporte," said the queen.

The young king approached his mother and said, "Why do as these people ask?"

"It must be so, my son," said Anne of Austria.

"But if they say, 'it must be' to me, am I no longer king?"

The queen remained silent.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "will your majesty permit me to ask you a question?"

Louis XIV. turned around, astonished that any one should dare to address him. But the queen pressed the child's hand.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Does your majesty remember, when playing in the park of Fontainebleau, or in the palace courts at Versailles, ever to have seen the sky grow suddenly dark and heard the sound of thunder?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, then, this noise of thunder, however much your majesty may have wished to continue playing, has said, 'go in, sire. You must do so.'"

"Certainly, sir; but they tell me that the noise of thunder is the voice of God."

"Well then, sire," continued D'Artagnan, "listen to the

noise of the people; you will perceive that it resembles that of thunder."

In truth at that moment a terrible murmur was wafted to them by the night breeze; then all at once it ceased.

"Hold, sire," said D'Artagnan, "they have just told the people that you are asleep; you see, you still are king."

The queen looked with surprise at this strange man, whose brilliant courage made him the equal of the bravest and who was, by his fine and quick intelligence, the equal of the most astute.

Laporte entered.

"Well, Laporte?" asked the queen.

"Madame," he replied, "Monsieur d'Artagnan's prediction has been accomplished; they are calm, as if by enchantment. The doors are about to be opened and in five minutes they will be here."

"Laporte," said the queen, "suppose you put one of your sons in the king's place; we might be off during the time."

"If your majesty desires it," said Laporte, "my sons, like myself, are at the queen's service."

"Not at all," said D'Artagnan; "should one of them know his majesty and discover but a substitute, all would be lost."

"You are right, sir, always right," said Anne of Austria. "Laporte, place the king in bed."

Laporte placed the king, dressed as he was, in the bed and then covered him as far as the shoulders with the sheet. The queen bent over him and kissed his brow.

"Pretend to sleep, Louis," said she.

"Yes," said the king, "but I do not wish to be touched by any of those men."

"Sire, I am here," said D'Artagnan, "and I give you my word, that if a single man has the audacity, his life shall pay for it."

"And now what is to be done?" asked the queen, "for I hear them."

"Monsieur Laporte, go to them and again recommend

silence. Madame, wait at the door, whilst I shall be at the head of the king's bed, ready to die for him."

Laporte went out; the queen remained standing near the hangings, whilst D'Artagnan glided behind the curtains.

Then the heavy and collected steps of a multitude of men were heard and the queen herself raised the tapestry hangings and put her finger on her lips.

On seeing the queen, the men stopped short, respectfully.

"Enter, gentlemen, enter," said the queen.

There was then amongst that crowd a moment's hesitation, which looked like shame. They had expected resistance, they had expected to be thwarted, to have to force the gates, to overturn the guards. The gates had opened of themselves; and the king, ostensibly at least, had no other guard at his bed-head but his mother. The foremost of them stammered and attempted to fall back.

"Enter, gentlemen," said Laporte, "since the queen desires you so to do."

Then one more bold than the rest ventured to pass the door and to advance on tiptoe. This example was imitated by the rest, until the room filled silently, as if these men had been the humblest, most devoted courtiers. Far beyond the door the heads of those who were not able to enter could be seen, all craning to their utmost height to try and see.

D'Artagnan saw it all through an opening he had made in the curtain, and in the very first man who entered he recognized Planchet.

"Sir," said the queen to him, thinking he was the leader of the band, "you wished to see the king and therefore I determined to show him to you myself. Approach and look at him and say if we have the appearance of people who wish to run away."

"No, certainly," replied Planchet, rather astonished at the unexpected honor conferred upon him.

"You will say, then, to my good and faithful Parisians," continued Anne, with a smile, the expression of which did not deceive D'Artagnan, "that you have seen the king in bed, asleep, and the queen also ready to retire."

"I shall tell them, madame, and those who accompany me will say the same thing; but——"

"But what?" asked Anne of Austria.

"Will your majesty pardon me," said Planchet, "but is it really the king who is lying there?"

Anne of Austria started. "If," she said, "there is one among you who knows the king, let him approach and say whether it is really his majesty lying there."

A man wrapped in a cloak, in the folds of which his face was hidden, approached and leaned over the bed and looked.

For one second D'Artagnan thought the man had some evil design and he put his hand to his sword; but in the movement made by the man in stooping a portion of his face was uncovered and D'Artagnan recognized the coadjutor.

"It is certainly the king," said the man, rising again. "God bless his majesty!"

"Yes," repeated the leader in a whisper, "God bless his majesty!" and all these men, who had entered enraged, passed from anger to pity and blessed the royal infant in their turn.

"Now," said Planchet, "let us thank the queen. My friends, retire."

They all bowed, and retired by degrees as noiselessly as they had entered. Planchet, who had been the first to enter, was the last to leave. The queen stopped him.

"What is your name, my friend?" she said.

Planchet, much surprised at the inquiry, turned back.

"Yes," continued the queen, "I think myself as much honored to have received you this evening as if you had been a prince, and I wish to know your name."

"Yes," thought Planchet, "to treat me as a prince. No, thank you."

D'Artagnan trembled lest Planchet, seduced, like the crow in the fable, should tell his name, and that the queen, knowing his name, would discover that Planchet had belonged to him.

"Madame," replied Planchet, respectfully, "I am called Dulaurier, at your service."

"Thank you, Monsieur Dulaurier," said the queen; "and what is your business?"

"Madame, I am a clothier in the Rue Bourdonnais."

"That is all I wished to know," said the queen. "Much obliged to you, Monsieur Dulaurier. You will hear again from me."

"Come, come," thought D'Artagnan, emerging from behind the curtain, "decidedly Monsieur Planchet is no fool; it is evident he has been brought up in a good school."

The different actors in this strange scene remained facing one another, without uttering a single word; the queen standing near the door, D'Artagnan half out of his hiding place, the king raised on his elbow, ready to fall down on his bed again at the slightest sound that would indicate the return of the multitude, but instead of approaching, the noise became more and more distant and very soon it died entirely away.

The queen breathed more freely. D'Artagnan wiped his damp forehead and the king slid off his bed, saying, "Let us go."

At this moment Laporte reappeared.

"Well?" asked the queen.

"Well, madame," replied the valet, "I followed them as far as the gates. They announced to all their comrades that they had seen the king and that the queen had spoken to them; and, in fact, they went away quite proud and happy."

"Oh, the miserable wretches!" murmured the queen, "they shall pay dearly for their boldness and it is I who promise this."

Then turning to D'Artagnan, she said:

"Sir, you have given me this evening the best advice I have ever received. Continue, and say what we must do now."

"Monsieur Laporte," said D'Artagnan, "finish dressing his majesty."

"We may go, then?" asked the queen.

"Whenever your majesty pleases. You have only to descend by the private stairs and you will find me at the door."

"Go, sir," said the queen; "I will follow you."

D'Artagnan went down and found the carriage at its post and the musketeer on the box. D'Artagnan took out the parcel, which he had desired Bernouin to place under the seat. It may be remembered that it was the hat and cloak belonging to Monsieur de Gondy's coachman.

He placed the cloak on his shoulders and the hat on his head, whilst the musketeer got off the box.

"Sir," said D'Artagnan, "you will go and release your companion, who is guarding the coachman. You must mount your horse and proceed to the Rue Tiquetonne, Hotel de la Chevrette, whence you will take my horse and that of Monsieur du Vallon, which you must saddle and equip as if for war, and then you will leave Paris, bringing them with you to Cours la Reine. If, when you arrive at Cours la Reine, you find no one, you must go on to Saint Germain. On the king's service."

The musketeer touched his cap and went away to execute the orders thus received.

D'Artagnan mounted the box, having a pair of pistols in his belt, a musket under his feet and a naked sword behind him.

The queen appeared, and was followed by the king and the Duke d'Anjou, his brother.

"Monsieur the coadjutor's carriage!" she exclaimed, falling back.

"Yes, madame," said D'Artagnan; "but get in fearlessly, for I myself will drive you."

The queen uttered a cry of surprise and entered the carriage and the king and monsieur took their places at her side.

"Come, Laporte," said the queen.

"How, madame!" said the valet, "in the same carriage as your majesties?"

"It is not a matter of royal etiquette this evening, but of the king's safety. Get in, Laporte."

Laporte obeyed.

"Pull down the blinds," said D'Artagnan.

"But will that not excite suspicion, sir?" asked the queen.

"Your majesty's mind may be quite at ease," replied the officer; "I have my answer ready."

The blinds were pulled down and they started at a gallop by the Rue Richelieu. On reaching the gate the captain of the post advanced at the head of a dozen men, holding a lantern in his hand.

D'Artagnan signed to them to draw near.

"Do you recognize the carriage?" he asked the sergeant.

"No," replied the latter.

"Look at the arms."

The sergeant put the lantern near the panel.

"They are those of monsieur le coadjuteur," he said.

"Hush; he is enjoying a ride with Madame de Guémenée."

The sergeant began to laugh.

"Open the gate," he cried. "I know who it is!" Then putting his face to the lowered blinds, he said:

"I wish you joy, my lord!"

"Impudent fellow!" cried D'Artagnan, "you will get me turned off."

The gate groaned on its hinges and D'Artagnan, seeing the way clear, whipped his horses, who started at a canter, and five minutes later they had rejoined the cardinal.

"Musqueton!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "draw up the blinds of his majesty's carriage."

"It is he!" cried Porthos.

"Disguised as a coachman!" exclaimed Mazarin.

"And driving the coadjutor's carriage!" said the queen.

"*Corpo di Dio!* Monsieur d'Artagnan!" said Mazarin, "you are worth your weight in gold."

CHAPTER LIII.

HOW D'ARTAGNAN AND PORTHOS EARNED BY SELLING STRAW,
THE ONE TWO HUNDRED AND NINETEEN, AND THE OTHER
TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTEEN LOUIS D'OR.

MAZARIN was desirous of setting out instantly for Saint Germain, but the queen declared that she should wait for the people whom she had appointed to meet her. However, she offered the cardinal Laporte's place, which he accepted and went from one carriage to the other.

It was not without foundation that a report of the king's intention to leave Paris by night had been circulated. Ten or twelve persons had been in the secret since six o'clock and howsoever great their prudence might be, they could not issue the necessary orders for the departure without suspicion being generated. Besides, each individual had one or two others for whom he was interested; and as there could be no doubt but that the queen was leaving Paris full of terrible projects of vengeance, every one had warned parents and friends of what was about to transpire; so that the news of the approaching exit ran like a train of lighted gunpowder along the streets.

The first carriage which arrived after that of the queen was that of the Prince de Condé, with the princess and dowager princess. Both these ladies had been awakened in the middle of the night and did not know what it all was about. The second contained the Duke and Duchess of Orleans, the tall young Mademoiselle and the Abbé de la Rivière; and the third, the Duke de Longueville and the Prince de Conti, brother and brother-in-law of Condé. They all alighted and

hastened to pay their respects to the king and queen in their coach. The queen fixed her eyes upon the carriage they had left, and seeing that it was empty, she said :

“ But where is Madame de Longueville ? ”

“ Ah, yes, where is my sister ? ” asked the prince.

“ Madame de Longueville is ill,” said the duke, “ and she desired me to excuse her to your majesty.”

Anne gave a quick glance to Mazarin, who answered by an almost imperceptible shake of his head.

“ What do you say of this ? ” asked the queen.

“ I say that she is a hostage for the Parisians,” answered the cardinal.

“ Why is she not come ? ” asked the prince in a low voice, addressing his brother.

“ Silence,” whispered the duke, “ she has her reasons.”

“ She will ruin us ! ” returned the prince.

“ She will save us,” said Conti.

Carriages now arrived in crowds ; those of the Maréchal de Villeroy, Guitant, Villequier and Comminges came into the line. The two musketeers arrived in their turn, holding the horses of D'Artagnan and Porthos in their hands. These two instantly mounted, the coachman of the latter replacing D'Artagnan on the coach-box of the royal coach. Musqueton took the place of the coachman, and drove standing, for reasons known to himself, like Automedon of antiquity.

The queen, though occupied by a thousand details, tried to catch the Gascon's eye ; but he, with his wonted prudence, had mingled with the crowd.

“ Let us be the *avant* guard,” said he to Porthos, “ and find good quarters at Saint Germain ; nobody will think of us and for my part I am greatly fatigued.”

“ As for me,” replied Porthos, “ I am falling asleep, which is strange, considering we have not had any fighting ; truly the Parisians are idiots.”

“ Or rather, we are very clever,” said D'Artagnan.

“ Perhaps.”

"And how is your wrist?"

"Better; but do you think that we've got them this time?"

"Got what?"

"You your command, and I my title?"

"I'faith! yes — I should expect so; besides, if they forget, I shall take the liberty of reminding them."

"The queen's voice! she is speaking," said Porthos; "I think she wants to ride on horseback."

"Oh, she would like it, but ——"

"But what?"

"The cardinal won't allow it. Gentlemen," he said, addressing the two musketeers, "accompany the royal carriage; we are going forward to look for lodgings."

D'Artagnan started off for Saint Germain, followed by Porthos.

"We will go on, gentlemen," said the queen.

And the royal carriage drove on, followed by the other coaches and about fifty horsemen.

They reached Saint Germain without any accident; on descending, the queen found the prince awaiting her, bare-headed, to offer her his hand.

"What an awakening for the Parisians!" said the queen, radiant.

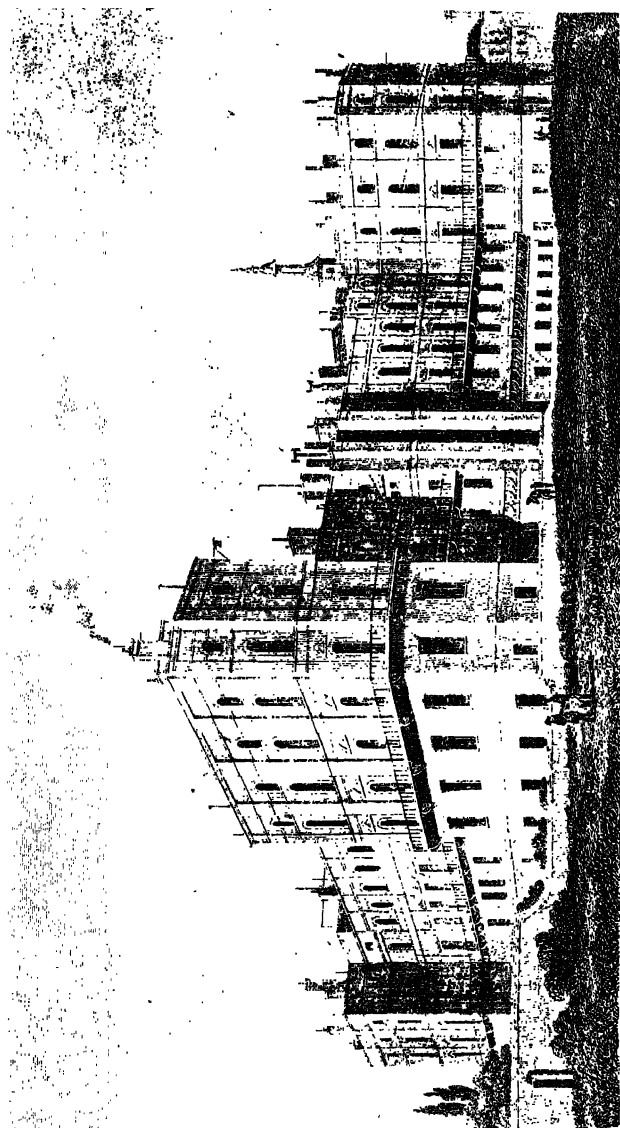
"It is war," said the prince.

"Well, then, let it be war! Have we not on our side the conqueror of Rocroy, of Nordlingen, of Lens?"

The prince bowed low.

It was then three o'clock in the morning. The queen walked first, every one followed her. About two hundred persons had accompanied her in her flight.

"Gentlemen," said the queen, laughing, "pray take up your abode in the château; it is large, and there will be no want of room for you all; but, as we never thought of coming here, I am informed that there are, in all, only three beds in the whole establishment, one for the king, one for me ——"



"And one for the cardinal," muttered the prince.

"Am I — am I, then, to sleep on the floor?" asked Gaston d'Orléans, with a forced smile.

"No, my prince," replied Mazarin, "the third bed is intended for your highness."

"But your eminence?" replied the prince.

"I," answered Mazarin, "I shall not sleep at all; I have work to do."

Gaston desired that he should be shown into the room wherein he was to sleep, without in the least concerning himself as to where his wife and daughter were to repose.

"Well, for my part, I shall go to bed," said D'Artagnan; "come, Porthos."

Porthos followed the lieutenant with that profound confidence he ever had in the wisdom of his friend. They walked from one end of the château to the other, Porthos looking with wondering eyes at D'Artagnan, who was counting on his fingers.

"Four hundred, at a pistole each, four hundred pistoles."

"Yes," interposed Porthos, "four hundred pistoles; but who is to make four hundred pistoles?"

"A pistole is not enough," said D'Artagnan; "'tis worth a louis."

"What is worth a louis?"

"Four hundred, at a louis each, make four hundred louis."

"Four hundred?" said Porthos.

"Yes, there are two hundred of them, and each of them will need two, which will make four hundred."

"But four hundred what?"

"Listen!" cried D'Artagnan.

But as there were all kinds of people about, who were in a state of stupefaction at the unexpected arrival of the court, he whispered in his friend's ear.

"I understand," answered Porthos, "I understand you perfectly, on my honor; two hundred louis, each of us, would be making a pretty thing of it; but what will people say?"

"Let them say what they will; besides, how will they know that we are doing it?"

"But who will distribute these things?" asked Porthos.

"Isn't Musqueton there?"

"But he wears my livery; my livery will be known," replied Porthos.

"He can turn his coat inside out."

"You are always in the right, my dear friend," cried Porthos; "but where the devil do you discover all the notions you put into practice?"

D'Artagnan smiled. The two friends turned down the first street they came to. Porthos knocked at the door of a house to the right, whilst D'Artagnan knocked at the door of a house to the left.

"Some straw," they said.

"Sir, we don't keep any," was the reply of the people who opened the doors; "but please ask at the hay dealer's."

"Where is the hay dealer's?"

"At the last large door in the street."

"Are there any other people in Saint Germain who sell straw?"

"Yes; there's the landlord of the Lamb, and Gros-Louis the farmer; they both live in the Rue des Ursulines."

"Very well."

D'Artagnan went instantly to the hay dealer and bargained with him for a hundred and fifty trusses of straw, which he obtained, at the rate of three pistoles each. He went afterward to the innkeeper and bought from him two hundred trusses at the same price. Finally, Farmer Louis sold them eighty trusses, making in all four hundred and thirty.

There was no more to be had in Saint Germain. This foraging did not occupy more than half an hour. Musqueton, duly instructed, was put at the head of this sudden and new business. He was cautioned not to let a bit of straw out of his hands under a louis the truss, and they intrusted to him straw to the amount of four hundred and thirty louis.

D'Artagnan, taking with him three trusses of straw, returned to the château, where everybody, freezing with cold and more than half asleep, envied the king, the queen, and the Duke of Orléans, on their camp beds. The lieutenant's entrance produced a burst of laughter in the great drawing-room; but he did not appear to notice that he was the object of general attention, but began to arrange, with so much cleverness, nicety and gayety, his straw bed, that the mouths of all these poor creatures, who could not go to sleep, began to water.

"Straw!" they all cried out, "straw! where is there any to be found?"

"I can show you," answered the Gascon.

And he conducted them to Musqueton, who freely distributed the trusses at the rate of a louis apiece. It was thought rather dear, but people wanted to sleep, and who would not give even two or three louis for a few hours of sound sleep?

D'Artagnan gave up his bed to any one who wanted it, making it over about a dozen times; and since he was supposed to have paid, like the others, a louis for his truss of straw, he pocketed in that way thirty louis in less than half an hour. At five o'clock in the morning the straw was worth eighty francs a truss and there was no more to be had.

D'Artagnan had taken the precaution to set apart four trusses for his own use. He put in his pocket the key of the room where he had hidden them, and accompanied by Porthos returned to settle with Musqueton, who, naïvely, and like the worthy steward that he was, handed them four hundred and thirty louis and kept one hundred for himself.

Musqueton, who knew nothing of what was going on in the château, wondered that the idea had not occurred to him sooner. D'Artagnan put the gold in his hat and in going back to the château settled the reckoning with Porthos; each of them had cleared two hundred and fifteen louis.

Porthos, however, found that he had no straw left for

himself. He returned to Musqueton, but the steward had sold the last wisp. He then repaired to D'Artagnan, who, thanks to his four trusses of straw, was in the act of making up and tasting, by anticipation, the luxury of a bed so soft, so well stuffed at the head, so well covered at the foot, that it would have excited the envy of the king himself, if his majesty had not been fast asleep in his own. D'Artagnan could on no account consent to pull his bed to pieces again for Porthos, but for a consideration of four louis that the latter paid him for it, he consented that Porthos should share his couch with him. He laid his sword at the head, his pistols by his side, stretched his cloak over his feet, placed his felt hat on the top of his cloak and extended himself luxuriously on the straw, which rustled under him. He was already enjoying the sweet dream engendered by the possession of two hundred and nineteen louis, made in a quarter of an hour, when a voice was heard at the door of the hall, which made him stir.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!" it cried.

"Here!" cried Porthos, "here!"

Porthos foresaw that if D'Artagnan was called away he should remain the sole possessor of the bed. An officer approached.

"I am come to fetch you, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"From whom?"

"His eminence sent me."

"Tell my lord that I'm going to sleep, and I advise him, as a friend, to do the same."

"His eminence is not gone to bed and will not go to bed, and wants you instantly."

"The devil take Mazarin, who does not know when to sleep at the proper time. What does he want with me? Is it to make me a captain? In that case I will forgive him."

And the musketeer rose, grumbling, took his sword, hat, pistols, and cloak, and followed the officer, whilst Porthos, alone and sole possessor of the bed, endeavored to follow

the good example of falling asleep, which his predecessor had set him.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the cardinal, on perceiving him, "I have not forgotten with what zeal you have served me. I am going to prove to you that I have not."

"Good," thought the Gascon, "this is a promising beginning."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," he resumed, "do you wish to become a captain?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And your friend still longs to be made a baron?"

"At this very moment, my lord, he no doubt dreams that he is one already."

"Then," said Mazarin, taking from his portfolio the letter which he had already shown D'Artagnan, "take this dispatch and carry it to England."

D'Artagnan looked at the envelope; there was no address on it.

"Am I not to know to whom to present it?"

"You will know when you reach London; at London you may tear off the outer envelope."

"And what are my instructions?"

"To obey in every particular the man to whom this letter is addressed. You must set out for Boulogne. At the Royal Arms of England you will find a young gentleman named Mordaunt."

"Yes, my lord; and what am I to do with this young gentleman?"

"Follow wherever he leads you."

D'Artagnan looked at the cardinal with a stupefied air.

"There are your instructions," said Mazarin; "go!"

"Go! 'tis easy to say so, but that requires money and I haven't any."

"Ah!" replied Mazarin, "so you have no money?"

"None, my lord."

"But the diamond I gave you yesterday?"

"I wish to keep it in remembrance of your eminence."

Mazarin sighed.

"'Tis very dear living in England, my lord, especially as envoy extraordinary."

"Zounds!" replied Mazarin, "the people there are very sedate, and their habits, since the revolution, simple; but no matter."

He opened a drawer and took out a purse.

"What do you say to a thousand crowns?"

D'Artagnan pouted out his lower lip in a most extraordinary manner.

"I reply, my lord, 'tis but little, as certainly I shall not go alone."

"I suppose not. Monsieur du Vallon, that worthy gentleman, for, with the exception of yourself, Monsieur d'Artagnan, there's not a man in France that I esteem and love so much as him ——"

"Then, my lord," replied D'Artagnan, pointing to the purse which Mazarin still held, "if you love and esteem him so much, you — understand me?"

"Be it so! on his account I add two hundred crowns."

"Scoundrel!" muttered D'Artagnan. "But on our return," he said aloud, "may we, that is, my friend and I, depend on having, he his barony, and I my promotion?"

"On the honor of Mazarin."

"I should like another sort of oath better," said D'Artagnan to himself; then aloud, "May I not offer my duty to her majesty the queen?"

"Her majesty is asleep and you must set off directly," replied Mazarin; "go, pray, sir ——"

"One word more, my lord; if there's any fighting where I'm going, must I fight?"

"You are to obey the commands of the personage to whom I have addressed the inclosed letter."

"'Tis well," said D'Artagnan, holding out his hand to receive the money. "I offer my best respects and services to you, my lord."

D'Artagnan then, returning to the officer, said:

"Sir, have the kindness also to awaken Monsieur du Val-lon and to say 'tis by his eminence's order, and that I shall await him at the stables."

The officer went off with an eagerness that showed the Gascon that he had some personal interest in the matter.

Porthos was snoring most musically when some one touched him on the shoulder.

"I come from the cardinal," said the officer.

"Heigho!" said Porthos, opening his large eyes; "what have you got to say?"

"That his eminence has ordered you to England and that Monsieur d'Artagnan is waiting for you in the stables."

Porthos sighed heavily, arose, took his hat, his pistols, and his cloak, and departed, casting a look of regret upon the couch where he had hoped to sleep so well.

No sooner had he turned his back than the officer laid himself down in it, and he had scarcely crossed the threshold before his successor, in his turn, was snoring immoderately. It was very natural, he being the only person in the whole assemblage, except the king, the queen, and the Duke of Orleans, who slept gratuitously.

CHAPTER LIV.

IN WHICH WE HEAR TIDINGS OF ARAMIS.

D'ARTAGNAN went straight to the stables; day was just dawning. He found his horse and that of Porthos fastened to the manger, but to an empty manger. He took pity on these poor animals and went to a corner of the stable, where he saw a little straw, but in doing so he struck his foot against a human body, which uttered a cry and arose on its knees, rubbing its eyes. It was Musqueton, who, having no straw to lie upon, had helped himself to that of the horses.

"Musqueton," cried D'Artagnan, "let us be off! Let us set off."

Musqueton, recognizing the voice of his master's friend, got up suddenly and in doing so let fall some louis which he had appropriated to himself illegally during the night.

"Ho! ho!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, picking up a louis and displaying it; "here's a louis that smells confoundedly of straw."

Musqueton blushed so confusedly that the Gascon began to laugh at him and said:

"Porthos would be angry, my dear Monsieur Musqueton, but I pardon you, only let us remember that this gold must serve us as a joke, so be gay — come along."

Musqueton instantly assumed a jovial countenance, saddled the horses quickly and mounted his own without making faces over it.

Whilst this went on, Porthos arrived with a very cross look on his face and was astonished to find the lieutenant resigned and Musqueton almost merry.

"Ah, that's it!" he cried, "you have your promotion and I my barony."

"We are going to fetch our brevets," said D'Artagnan, "and when we come back, Master Mazarin will sign them."

"And where are we going?" asked Porthos.

"To Paris first; I have affairs to settle."

And they both set out for Paris.

On arriving at its gates they were astounded to see the threatening aspect of the capital. Around a broken-down carriage the people were uttering imprecations, whilst the persons who had attempted to escape were made prisoners—that is to say, an old man and two women. On the other hand, as the two friends approached to enter, they showed them every kind of civility, thinking them deserters from the royal party and wishing to bind them to their own.

"What is the king doing?" they asked.

"He is asleep."

"And the Spanish woman?"

"Dreaming."

"And the cursed Italian?"

"He is awake, so keep on the watch, as they are gone away; it's for some purpose, rely on it. But as you are the strongest, after all," continued D'Artagnan, "don't be furious with old men and women and keep your wrath for more appropriate occasions."

The people listened to these words and let go the ladies, who thanked D'Artagnan with an eloquent look.

"Now! onward!" cried the Gascon.

And they continued their way, crossing the barricades, getting the chains about their legs, pushed about, questioning and questioned.

In the place of the Palais Royal D'Artagnan saw a sergeant, who was drilling six or seven hundred citizens. It was Planchet, who brought into play profitably the recollections of the regiment of Piedmont.

In passing before D'Artagnan he recognized his former master.

"Good-day, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Planchet, proudly.

"Good-day, Monsieur Dulaurier," replied D'Artagnan.

Planchet stopped short, staring at D'Artagnan. The first row, seeing their sergeant stop, stopped in their turn and so on to the very last.

"These citizens are dreadfully ridiculous," observed D'Artagnan to Porthos and went on his way.

Five minutes afterward he entered the hotel of La Chevette, where pretty Madeleine, the hostess, came to him.

"My dear Mistress Turquaine," said the Gascon, "if you happen to have any money, lock it up quickly; if you happen to have any jewels, hide them directly; if you happen to have any debtors, make them pay you, or any creditors, don't pay them."

"Why, prithee?" asked Madeleine.

"Because Paris is going to be reduced to dust and ashes like Babylon, of which you have no doubt heard tell."

"And are you going to leave me at such a time?"

"This very instant."

"And where are you going?"

"Ah, if you could tell me that, you would be doing me a service."

"Ah, me! ah, me!"

"Have you any letters for me?" inquired D'Artagnan, wishing to signify to the hostess that her lamentations were superfluous and that therefore she had better spare him demonstrations of her grief.

"There's one just arrived," and she handed the letter to D'Artagnan.

"From Athos!" cried D'Artagnan, recognizing the handwriting.

"Ah!" said Porthos, "let us hear what he says."

D'Artagnan opened the letter and read as follows:

"Dear D'Artagnan, dear Du Vallon, my good friends, perhaps this may be the last time that you will ever hear from me. Aramis and I are very unhappy; but God, our courage, and the remembrance of our friendship sustain us. Think often of Raoul. I intrust to you certain papers which

are at Blois; and in two months and a half, if you do not hear of us, take possession of them.

"Embrace, with all your heart, the vicomte, for your devoted friend,
ATHOS."

"I believe, by Heaven," said D'Artagnan, "that I shall embrace him, since he's upon our road; and if he is so unfortunate as to lose our dear Athos, from that very day he becomes my son."

"And I," said Porthos, "shall make him my sole heir."

"Let us see, what more does Athos say?"

"Should you meet on your journey a certain Monsieur Mordaunt, distrust him; in a letter I cannot say more."

"Monsieur Mordaunt!" exclaimed the Gascon, surprised.

"Monsieur Mordaunt! 'tis well," said Porthos; "we shall remember that; but see, there is a postscript from Aramis."

"So there is," said D'Artagnan, and he read:

"We conceal the place where we are, dear friends, knowing your brotherly affection and that you would come and die with us were we to reveal it."

"Confound it," interrupted Porthos, with an explosion of passion which sent Musqueton to the other end of the room; "are they in danger of dying?"

D'Artagnan continued:

"Athos bequeaths to you Raoul and I bequeath to you my revenge. If by any good luck you lay your hand on a certain man named Mordaunt, tell Porthos to take him into a corner and to wring his neck. I dare not say more in a letter.
ARAMIS."

"If that is all, it is easily done," said Porthos.

"On the contrary," observed D'Artagnan, with a vexed look; "it would be impossible."

"How so?"

"It is precisely this Monsieur Mordaunt whom we are going to join at Boulogne and with whom we cross to England."

"Well, suppose instead of joining this Monsieur Mordaunt we were to go and join our friends?" said Porthos, with a gesture fierce enough to have frightened an army.

"I did think of it, but this letter has neither date nor postmark."

"True," said Porthos. And he began to wander about the room like a man beside himself, gesticulating and half drawing his sword out of the scabbard.

As to D'Artagnan, he remained standing like a man in consternation, with the deepest affliction depicted on his face.

"Ah, this is not right; Athos insults us; he wishes to die alone; it is bad, bad, bad."

Musqueton, witnessing this despair, melted into tears in a corner of the room.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, "all this leads to nothing. Let us go on. We will embrace Raoul and perhaps he will have news of Athos."

"Stop—an idea!" cried Porthos; "indeed, my dear D'Artagnan, I don't know how you manage, but you are always full of ideas; let us go and embrace Raoul."

"Woe to that man who should happen to contradict my master at this moment," said Musqueton to himself; "I wouldn't give a farthing for his life."

They set out. On arriving at the Rue Saint Denis, the friends found a vast concourse of people. It was the Duc de Beaufort, who was coming from the Vendômois and whom the coadjutor was showing to the Parisians, intoxicated with joy. With the duke's aid they already considered themselves invincible.

The two friends turned off into a side street to avoid meeting the prince and so reached the Saint Denis gate.

"Is it true," said the guard to the two cavaliers, "that the Duc de Beaufort has arrived in Paris?"

"Nothing more certain; and the best proof of it is," said D'Artagnan, "that he has dispatched us to meet the Duc de Vendôme, his father, who is coming in his turn."

"Long live De Beaufort!" cried the guards, and they drew back respectfully to let the two friends pass. Once across the barriers these two knew neither fatigue nor fear. Their horses flew and they never ceased speaking of Athos and Aramis.

The camp had entered Saint Omer; the friends made a little detour and went to the camp, and gave the army an exact account of the flight of the king and queen. They found Raoul near his tent, reclining on a truss of hay, of which his horse stole some mouthfuls; the young man's eyes were red and he seemed dejected. The Maréchal de Grammont and the Comte de Guiche had returned to Paris and he was quite lonely. And as soon as he saw the two cavaliers he ran to them with open arms.

"Oh, is it you, dear friends? Did you come here to fetch me? Will you take me away with you? Do you bring me tidings of my guardian?"

"Have you not received any?" said D'Artagnan to the youth.

"Alas! sir, no, and I do not know what has become of him; so that I am really so unhappy that I weep."

In fact, tears rolled down his cheeks.

Porthos turned aside, in order not to show by his honest round face what was passing in his mind.

"Deuce take it!" cried D'Artagnan, more moved than he had been for a long time, "don't despair, my friend; if *you* have not received any letters from the count, *we* have received one."

"Oh, really!" cried Raoul.

"And a comforting one, too," added D'Artagnan, seeing the delight that his intelligence gave the young man.

"Have you it?" asked Raoul.

"Yes—that is, I had it," replied the Gascon, making believe to find it. "Wait, it ought to be there, in my pocket; it speaks of his return, does it not, Porthos?"

All Gascon as he was, D'Artagnan could not bear alone the weight of that falsehood.

"Yes," replied Porthos, coughing.

"Oh, give it to me!" said the young man.

"Eh! I read it a little while since. Can I have lost it? Ah! confound it! yes, my pocket has a hole in it."

"Oh, yes, Monsieur Raoul!" said Musqueton; "the letter was very consoling. These gentlemen read it to me and I wept for joy."

"But at any rate, you know where he is, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" asked Raoul, somewhat comforted.

"Ah! that's the thing!" replied the Gascon. "Undoubtedly I know it, but it is a mystery."

"Not to me, I hope?"

"No, not to you, so I am going to tell you where he is." Porthos devoured D'Artagnan with wondering eyes.

"Where the devil shall I say that he is, so that he cannot try to rejoin him?" thought D'Artagnan.

"Well, where is he, sir?" asked Raoul, in a soft and coaxing voice.

"He is at Constantinople."

"Among the Turks!" exclaimed Raoul, alarmed. "Good heavens! how can you tell me that?"

"Does that alarm you?" cried D'Artagnan. "Pooh! what are the Turks to such men as the Comte de la Fère and the Abbé d'Herblay?"

"Ah, his friend is with him?" said Raoul. "That comforts me a little."

"Has he wit or not—this demon D'Artagnan?" said Porthos, astonished at his friend's deception.

"Now, sir," said D'Artagnan, wishing to change the conversation, "here are fifty pistoles that the count has sent you by the same courier. I suppose you have no more money and that they will be welcome."

"I have still twenty pistoles, sir."

"Well, take them; that makes seventy."

"And if you wish for more," said Porthos, putting his hand to his pocket —

"Thank you, sir," replied Raoul, blushing; "thank you a thousand times."

At this moment Olivain appeared. "Apropos," said D'Artagnan, loud enough for the servant to hear him, "are you satisfied with Olivain?"

"Yes, in some respects, tolerably well."

Olivain pretended to have heard nothing and entered the tent.

"What fault do you find with the fellow?"

"He is a glutton."

"Oh, sir!" cried Olivain, reappearing at this accusation.

"And a little bit of a thief."

"Oh, sir! oh!"

"And, more especially, a notorious coward."

"Oh, oh! sir! you really vilify me!" cried Olivain.

"The deuce!" cried D'Artagnan. "Pray learn, Monsieur Olivain, that people like us are not to be served by cowards. Rob your master, eat his sweetmeats, and drink his wine; but, by Jove! don't be a coward, or I shall cut off your ears. Look at Monsieur Mouston, see the honorable wounds he has received, observe how his habitual valor has given dignity to his countenance."

Musqueton was in the third heaven and would have embraced D'Artagnan had he dared; meanwhile he resolved to sacrifice his life for him on the next occasion that presented itself.

"Send away that fellow, Raoul," said the Gascon; "for if he's a coward he will disgrace thee some day."

"Monsieur says I am a coward," cried Olivain, "because he wanted the other day to fight a cornet in Grammont's regiment and I refused to accompany him."

"Monsieur Olivain, a lackey ought never to disobey," said D'Artagnan, sternly; then taking him aside, he whis-

pered to him: "Thou hast done right; thy master was in the wrong; here's a crown for thee; but should he ever be insulted and thou dost not let thyself be cut in quarters for him, I will cut out thy tongue. Remember that."

Olivain bowed and slipped the crown into his pocket.

"And now, Raoul," said the Gascon, "Monsieur du Vallon and I are going away as ambassadors, where, I know not; but should you want anything, write to Madame Turquoise, at La Chevrette, Rue Tiquetonne, and draw upon her purse as on a banker — with economy; for it is not so well filled as that of Monsieur d'Emery."

And having, meantime, embraced his ward, he passed him into the robust arms of Porthos, who lifted him up from the ground and held him a moment suspended near the noble heart of the formidable giant.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, "let us go."

And they set out for Boulogne, where toward evening they arrived, their horses flecked with foam and dark with perspiration.

At ten steps from the place where they halted, was a young man in black, who seemed waiting for some one and who, from the moment he saw them enter the town, never took his eyes off them.

D'Artagnan approached him and, seeing him stare so fixedly, said:

"Well, friend! I don't like people to quiz me!"

"Sir," said the young man, "do you not come from Paris, if you please?"

D'Artagnan thought it was some gossip who wanted news from the capital.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a softened tone.

"Are you not going to put up at the 'Arms of England'?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you not charged with a mission from his eminence, Cardinal Mazarin?"

"Yes, sir."

"In that case, I am the man you have to do with. I am M. Mordaunt."

"Ah!" thought D'Artagnan, "the man I am warned against by Athos."

"Ah!" thought Porthos, "the man Aramis wants me to strangle."

They both looked searchingly at the young man, who misunderstood the meaning of that inquisition.

"Do you doubt my word?" he said. "In that case I can give you proofs."

"No, sir," said D'Artagnan; "and we place ourselves at your orders."

"Well, gentlemen," resumed Mordaunt, "we must set out without delay; to-day is the last day granted me by the cardinal. My ship is ready and had you not come I must have set off without you, for General Cromwell expects my return impatiently."

"So!" thought the lieutenant, "'tis to General Cromwell that our dispatches are addressed."

"Have you no letter for him?" asked the young man.

"I have one, the seal of which I am not to break till I reach London; but since you tell me to whom it is addressed, 'tis useless to wait till then."

D'Artagnan tore open the envelope of the letter. It was directed to "Monsieur Oliver Cromwell, General of the Army of the English Nation."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan; "a singular commission."

"Who is this Monsieur Oliver Cromwell?" inquired Porthos.

"Formerly a brewer," replied the Gascon.

"Perhaps Mazarin wishes to make a speculation in beer, as we did in straw," said Porthos.

"Come, come, gentlemen," said Mordaunt, impatiently, "let us depart."

"What!" exclaimed Porthos, "without supper? Cannot Monsieur Cromwell wait a little?"

"Yes, but I?" said Mordaunt.

"Well, you," said Porthos; "what then?"

"I cannot wait."

"Oh! as to you, that is not my concern, and I shall sup either with or without your permission."

The young man's eyes kindled in secret, but he restrained himself.

"Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "you must excuse famished travelers. Besides, our supper can't delay you much. We will hasten on to the inn; you will meanwhile proceed on foot to the harbor. We will take a bite and shall be there as soon as you are."

"Just as you please, gentlemen, provided we set sail," he said.

"The name of your ship?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"The *Standard*."

"Very well; in half an hour we shall be on board." And the friends, spurring on their horses, rode to the hotel, the "Arms of England."

"What do you say of that young man?" asked D'Artagnan, as they hurried along.

"I say that he doesn't suit me at all," said Porthos, "and that I feel a strong itching to follow Aramis's advice."

"By no means, my dear Porthos; that man is a messenger of General Cromwell; it would insure for us a poor reception, I imagine, should it be announced to him that we had twisted the neck of his confidant."

"Nevertheless," said Porthos, "I have always noticed that Aramis gave good advice."

"Listen," returned D'Artagnan, "when our embassy is finished ——"

"Well?"

"If it brings us back to France ——"

"Well?"

"Well, we shall see."

At that moment the two friends reached the hotel, "Arms of England," where they supped with hearty appetite and then at once proceeded to the port.

There they found a brig ready to set sail, upon the deck of which they recognized Mordaunt walking up and down impatiently.

"It is singular," said D'Artagnan, whilst the boat was taking them to the *Standard*, "it is astonishing how that young man resembles some one I must have known, but who it was I cannot yet remember."

A few minutes later they were on board, but the embarkation of horses was a longer matter than that of the men, and it was eight o'clock before they raised anchor.

The young man stamped impatiently and ordered all sail to be spread.

Porthos, completely used up by three nights without sleep and a journey of seventy leagues on horseback, retired to his cabin and went to sleep.

D'Artagnan, overcoming his repugnance to Mordaunt, walked with him upon the deck and invented a hundred stories to make him talk.

Musqueton was seasick.

CHAPTER LV.

THE SCOTCHMAN.

AND now our readers must leave the *Standard* to sail peaceably, not toward London, where D'Artagnan and Porthos believed they were going, but to Durham, whither Mordaunt had been ordered to repair by the letter he had received during his sojourn at Boulogne, and accompany us to the royalist camp, on this side of the Tyne, near Newcastle.

There, placed between two rivers on the borders of Scotland, but still on English soil, the tents of a little army extended. It was midnight. Some Highlanders were listlessly keeping watch. The moon, which was partially obscured by heavy clouds, now and then lit up the muskets of the sentinels, or silvered the walls, the roofs, and the spires of the town that Charles I. had just surrendered to the parliamentary troops, whilst Oxford and Newark still held out for him in the hopes of coming to some arrangement.

At one of the extremities of the camp, near an immense tent, in which the Scottish officers were holding a kind of council, presided over by Lord Leven, their commander, a man attired as a cavalier lay sleeping on the turf, his right hand extended over his sword.

About fifty paces off, another man, also appareled as a cavalier, was talking to a Scotch sentinel, and, though a foreigner, he seemed to understand without much difficulty the answers given in the broad Perthshire dialect.

As the town clock of Newcastle struck one the sleeper awoke and with all the gestures of a man rousing himself out of deep sleep he looked attentively about him ; perceiv-

ing that he was alone he rose and making a little circuit passed close to the cavalier who was speaking to the sentinel. The former had no doubt finished his questions, for a moment later he said good-night and carelessly followed the same path taken by the first cavalier.

In the shadow of a tent the former was awaiting him.

"Well, my dear friend?" said he, in as pure French as has ever been uttered between Rouen and Tours.

"Well, my friend, there is not a moment to lose; we must let the king know immediately."

"Why, what is the matter?"

"It would take too long to tell you; besides, you will hear it all directly and the least word dropped here might ruin all. We must go and find Lord Winter."

They both set off to the other end of the camp, but as it did not cover more than a surface of five hundred feet they quickly arrived at the tent they were looking for.

"Tony, is your master sleeping?" said one of the two cavaliers to a servant who was lying in the outer compartment, which served as a kind of ante-room.

"No, monsieur le comte," answered the servant, "I think not; or at least he has not long been so, for he was pacing up and down for more than two hours after he left the king, and the sound of his footsteps has only ceased during the last ten minutes. However, you may look and see," added the lackey, raising the curtained entrance of the tent.

Lord Winter was seated near an aperture, arranged as a window to let in the night air, his eyes mechanically following the course of the moon, intermittently veiled, as we before observed, by heavy clouds. The two friends approached Winter, who, with his head on his hands, was gazing at the heavens; he did not hear them enter and remained in the same attitude till he felt a hand upon his shoulder.

He turned around, recognized Athos and Aramis and held out his hand to them.

"Have you observed," said he to them, "what a blood-red color the moon has to-night?"

"No," replied Athos; "I thought it looked much the same as usual."

"Look, again, chevalier," returned Lord Winter.

"I must own," said Aramis, "I am like the Comte de la Fère — I can see nothing remarkable about it."

"My lord," said Athos, "in a position so precarious as ours we must examine the earth and not the heavens. Have you studied our Scotch troops and have you confidence in them?"

"The Scotch?" inquired Winter. "What Scotch?"

"Ours, egad!" exclaimed Athos. "Those in whom the king has confided — Lord Leven's Highlanders."

"No," said Winter, then he paused; "but tell me, can you not perceive the russet tint which marks the heavens?"

"Not the least in the world," said Aramis and Athos at once.

"Tell me," continued Winter, always possessed by the same idea, "is there not a tradition in France that Henry IV., the evening before the day he was assassinated, when he was playing at chess with M. de Bassompierre, saw clots of blood upon the chessboard?"

"Yes," said Athos, "and the maréchal has often told me so himself."

"Then it was so," murmured Winter, "and the next day Henry IV. was killed."

"But what has this vision of Henry IV. to do with you, my lord?" inquired Aramis.

"Nothing; and indeed I am mad to trouble you with such things, when your coming to my tent at such an hour announces that you are the bearers of important news."

"Yes, my lord," said Athos, "I wish to speak to the king."

"To the king! but the king is asleep."

"I have something important to reveal to him."

"Can it not be put off till to-morrow?"

"He must know it this moment, and perhaps it is already too late."

"Come, then," said Lord Winter.

Lord Winter's tent was pitched by the side of the royal marquee, a kind of corridor communicating between the two. This corridor was guarded, not by a sentinel, but by a confidential servant, through whom, in case of urgency, Charles could communicate instantly with his faithful subject.

"These gentlemen are with me," said Winter.

The lackey bowed and let them pass. As he had said, on a camp bed, dressed in his black doublet, booted, unbelted, with his felt hat beside him, lay the king, overcome by sleep and fatigue. They advanced, and Athos, who was the first to enter, gazed a moment in silence on that pale and noble face, framed in its long and now untidy, matted hair, the blue veins showing through the transparent temples, his eyes seemingly swollen by tears.

Athos sighed deeply; the sigh woke the king, so lightly did he sleep.

He opened his eyes.

"Ah!" said he, raising himself on his elbow, "is it you, Comte de la Fère?"

"Yes, sire," replied Athos.

"You watch while I sleep and you have come to bring me some news?"

"Alas, sire," answered Athos, "your majesty has guessed aright."

"It is bad news?"

"Yes, sire."

"Never mind; the messenger is welcome. You never come to me without conferring pleasure. You whose devotion recognizes neither country nor misfortune, you who are sent to me by Henrietta; whatever news you bring, speak out."

"Sire, Cromwell has arrived this night at Newcastle."

"Ah!" exclaimed the king, "to fight?"

"No, sire, but to buy your majesty."

"What did you say?"

"I said, sire, that four hundred thousand pounds are owing to the Scottish army."

"For unpaid wages; yes, I know it. For the last year my faithful Highlanders have fought for honor alone."

Athos smiled.

"Well, sire, though honor is a fine thing, they are tired of fighting for it and to-night they have sold you for two hundred thousand pounds — that is to say, for half what is owing them."

"Impossible!" cried the king; "the Scotch sell their king for two hundred thousand pounds! And who is the Judas who has concluded this infamous bargain?"

"Lord Leven."

"Are you certain of it, sir?"

"I heard it with my own ears."

The king sighed deeply, as if his heart would break, and then buried his face in his hands.

"Oh! the Scotch," he exclaimed, "the Scotch I called 'my faithful,' to whom I trusted myself when I could have fled to Oxford! the Scotch, my brothers! But are you well assured, sir?"

"Lying behind the tent of Lord Leven, I raised it and saw all, heard all!"

"And when is this to be consummated?"

"To-day — this morning; so your majesty must perceive there is no time to lose!"

"To do what? since you say I am sold."

"To cross the Tyne, reach Scotland and rejoin Lord Montrose, who will not sell you."

"And what shall I do in Scotland? A war of partisans, unworthy of a king."

"The example of Robert Bruce will absolve you, sire."

"No, no! I have fought too long; they have sold me, they shall give me up, and the eternal shame of treble treason shall fall on their heads."

"Sire," said Athos, "perhaps a king should act thus, but not a husband and a father. I have come in the name of your wife and daughter and of the children you have still in London, and I say to you, 'Live, sire,' — it is the will of Heaven."

The king raised himself, buckled on his belt, and passing his handkerchief over his moist forehead, said :

"Well, what is to be done?"

"Sire, have you in the army one regiment on which you can implicitly rely?"

"Winter," said the king, "do you believe in the fidelity of yours?"

"Sire, they are but men and men are become both weak and wicked. I will not answer for them. I would confide my life to them, but I should hesitate ere I trusted them with your majesty's."

"Well!" said Athos, "since you have not a regiment, we are three devoted men. It is enough. Let your majesty mount on horseback and place yourself in the midst of us; we will cross the Tyne, reach Scotland and you will be saved."

"Is this your counsel also, Winter?" inquired the king.

"Yes, sire."

"And yours, Monsieur d'Herblay?"

"Yes, sire."

"As you wish, then. Winter, give the necessary orders."

Winter then left the tent; in the meantime the king finished his toilet. The first rays of daybreak penetrated the aperture of the tent as Winter re-entered it.

"All is ready, sire," said he.

"For us, also?" inquired Athos.

"Grimaud and Blasoïs are holding your horses, ready saddled."

"In that case," exclaimed Athos, "let us not lose an instant, but set off."

"Come," added the king.

"Sire," said Aramis, "will not your majesty acquaint some of your friends of this?"

"Friends!" answered Charles, sadly, "I have but three—one of twenty years, who has never forgotten me, and two of a week's standing, whom I shall never forget. Come, gentlemen, come."

The king quitted his tent and found his horse ready waiting for him. It was a chestnut that the king had ridden for three years and of which he was very fond.

The horse neighed with pleasure at seeing him.

"Ah!" said the king, "I was unjust; here is a creature that loves me. You at least will be faithful to me, Arthur."

The horse, as if it understood these words, bent its red nostrils toward the king's face and parting his lips displayed all its teeth, as if with pleasure.

"Yes, yes," said the king, caressing it with his hand, "yes, my Arthur, thou art a fond and faithful creature."

After this little scene Charles threw himself into the saddle, and turning to Athos, Aramis and Winter, said:

"Now, gentlemen, I am at your service."

But Athos was standing with his eyes fixed on a black line which bordered the banks of the Tyne and seemed to extend double the length of the camp.

"What is that line?" cried Athos, whose vision was still rather obscured by the uncertain shades and demi-tints of daybreak. "What is that line? I did not observe it yesterday."

"It must be the fog rising from the river," said the king.

"Sire, it is something more opaque than the fog."

"Indeed!" said Winter, "it appears to me like a bar of red color."

"It is the enemy, who have made a sortie from Newcastle and are surrounding us!" exclaimed Athos.

"The enemy!" cried the king.

"Yes, the enemy. It is too late. Stop a moment; does not that sunbeam yonder, just by the side of the town, glitter on the Ironsides?"

This was the name given the cuirassiers, whom Cromwell had made his body-guard.

"Ah!" said the king, "we shall soon see whether my Highlanders have betrayed me or not."

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed Athos.

"To give them the order to charge, and run down these miserable rebels."

And the king, putting spurs to his horse, set off to the tent of Lord Leven.

"Follow him," said Athos.

"Come!" exclaimed Aramis.

"Is the king wounded?" cried Lord Winter. "I see spots of blood on the ground." And he set off to follow the two friends.

He was stopped by Athos.

"Go and call out your regiment," said he; "I can foresee that we shall have need of it directly."

Winter turned his horse and the two friends rode on. It had taken but two minutes for the king to reach the tent of the Scottish commander; he dismounted and entered.

The general was there, surrounded by the more prominent chiefs.

"The king!" they exclaimed, as all rose in bewilderment.

Charles was indeed in the midst of them, his hat on his head, his brows bent, striking his boot with his riding whip.

"Yes, gentlemen, the king in person, the king who has come to ask for some account of what has happened."

"What is the matter, sire?" exclaimed Lord Leven.

"It is this, sir," said the king, angrily, "that General Cromwell has reached Newcastle; that you knew it and I was not informed of it; that the enemy have left the town and are now closing the passages of the Tyne against us; that our sentinels have seen this movement and I have been left unacquainted with it; that, by an infamous treaty, you have sold me for two hundred thousand pounds to Parliament. Of this treaty, at least, I have been warned. This is the matter, gentlemen; answer and exculpate yourselves, for I stand here to accuse you."

"Sire," said Lord Leven, with hesitation, "sire, your majesty has been deceived by false reports."

"My own eyes have seen the enemy extend itself between myself and Scotland; and I can almost say that with my own ears I have heard the clauses of the treaty debated."

The Scotch chieftains looked at each other in their turn with frowning brows.

"Sire," murmured Lord Leven, crushed by shame; "sire, we are ready to give you every proof of our fidelity."

"I ask but one," said the king; "put the army in battle array and face the enemy."

"That cannot be, sire," said the earl.

"How, cannot be? What hinders it?" exclaimed the king.

"Your majesty is well aware that there is a truce between us and the English army."

"And if there is a truce the English army has broken it by quitting the town, contrary to the agreement which kept it there. Now, I tell you, you must pass with me through this army across to Scotland, and if you refuse you may choose betwixt two names, which the contempt of all honest men will brand you with—you are either cowards or traitors!"

The eyes of the Scotch flashed fire; and as often happens on such occasions, from shame they passed to effrontery and two heads of clans advanced upon the king.

"Yes," said they, "we have promised to deliver Scotland and England from him who for the last five-and-twenty years has sucked the blood and gold of Scotland and England. We have promised and we will keep our promise. Charles Stuart, you are our prisoner."

And both extended their hands as if to seize the king, but before they could touch him with the tips of their fingers, both had fallen, one dead, the other stunned.

Aramis had passed his sword through the body of the first and Athos had knocked down the other with the butt end of his pistol.

Then, as Lord Leven and the other chieftains recoiled before this unexpected rescue, which seemed to come from Heaven for the prince they already thought was their prisoner, Athos and Aramis dragged the king from the perjured assembly into which he had so imprudently ventured, and throwing themselves on horseback all three returned at full gallop to the royal tent.

On their road they perceived Lord Winter marching at the head of his regiment. The king motioned him to accompany them.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE AVENGER.

THEY all four entered the tent; they had no plan ready — they must think of one.

The king threw himself into an arm-chair. "I am lost," said he.

"No, sire," replied Athos. "You are only betrayed."

The king sighed deeply.

"Betrayed! yes — betrayed by the Scotch, amongst whom I was born, whom I have always loved better than the English. Oh, traitors that ye are!"

"Sire," said Athos, "this is not a moment for recrimination, but a time to show yourself a king and a gentleman. Up, sire! up! for you have here at least three men who will not betray you. Ah! if we had been five!" murmured Athos, thinking of D'Artagnan and Porthos.

"What do you say?" inquired Charles, rising.

"I say, sire, that there is now but one way open. Lord Winter answers for his regiment, or at least very nearly so — we will not split straws about words — let him place himself at the head of his men, we will place ourselves at the side of your majesty, and we will mow a swath through Cromwell's army and reach Scotland."

"There is another method," said Aramis. "Let one of us put on the dress and mount the king's horse. Whilst they pursue him the king might escape."

"It is good advice," said Athos, "and if the king will do one of us the honor we shall be truly grateful to him."

"What do you think of this counsel, Winter?" asked the king, looking with admiration at these two men, whose chief

idea seemed to be how they could take on their shoulders all the dangers that assailed him.

"I think the only chance of saving your majesty has just been proposed by Monsieur d'Herblay. I humbly entreat your majesty to choose quickly, for we have not an instant to lose."

"But if I accept, it is death, or at least imprisonment, for him who takes my place."

"He will have had the glory of having saved his king," cried Winter.

The king looked at his old friend with tears in his eyes; undid the Order of the Saint Esprit which he wore, to honor the two Frenchmen who were with him, and passed it around Winter's neck, who received on his knees this striking proof of his sovereign's confidence and friendship.

"It is right," said Athos; "he has served your majesty longer than we have."

The king overheard these words and turned around with tears in his eyes.

"Wait a moment, sir," said he; "I have an order for each of you also."

He turned to a closet where his own orders were locked up, and took out two ribbons of the Order of the Garter.

"These cannot be for us," said Athos.

"Why not, sir?" asked Charles.

"Such are for royalty, and we are simple commoners."

"Speak not of crowns. I shall not find amongst them such great hearts as yours. No, no, you do yourselves injustice; but I am here to do you justice. On your knees, count."

Athos knelt down and the king passed the ribbon down from left to right as usual, raised his sword, and instead of pronouncing the customary formula, "I make you a knight. Be brave, faithful and loyal," he said, "You are brave, faithful and loyal. I knight you, monsieur le comte."

Then turning to Aramis, he said:

"It is now your turn, monsieur le chevalier."

The same ceremony recommenced, with the same words, whilst Winter unlaced his leather cuirass, that he might disguise himself like the king. Charles, having proceeded with Aramis as with Athos, embraced them both.

"Sire," said Winter, who in this trying emergency felt all his strength and energy fire up, "we are ready."

The king looked at the three gentlemen. "Then we must fly!" said he.

"Flying through an army, sire," said Athos, "in all countries in the world is called *charging*."

"Then I shall die, sword in hand," said Charles. "Monsieur le comte, monsieur le chevalier, if ever I am king——"

"Sire, you have already done us more honor than simple gentlemen could ever aspire to, therefore, gratitude is on our side. But we must not lose time. We have already wasted too much."

The king again shook hands with all three, exchanged hats with Winter and went out.

Winter's regiment was ranged on some high ground above the camp. The king, followed by the three friends, turned his steps that way. The Scotch camp seemed as if at last awakened; the soldiers had come out of their tents and taken up their station in battle array.

"Do you see that?" said the king. "Perhaps they are penitent and preparing to march."

"If they are penitent," said Athos, "let them follow us."

"Well!" said the king, "what shall we do?"

"Let us examine the enemy's army."

At the same instant the eyes of the little group were fixed on the same line which at daybreak they had mistaken for fog and which the morning sun now plainly showed was an army in order of battle. The air was soft and clear, as it generally is at that early hour of the morning. The regiments, the standards, and even the colors of the horses and uniforms were now clearly distinct.

On the summit of a rising ground, a little in advance of

the enemy, appeared a short and heavy looking man ; this man was surrounded by officers. He turned a spyglass toward the little group amongst which the king stood.

"Does this man know your majesty personally ?" inquired Aramis.

Charles smiled.

"That man is Cromwell," said he.

"Then draw down your hat, sire, that he may not discover the substitution."

"Ah !" said Athos, "how much time we have lost."

"Now," said the king, "give the word and let us start."

"Will you not give it, sire ?" asked Athos.

"No ; I make you my lieutenant-general," said the king.

"Listen, then, Lord Winter. Proceed, sire, I beg. What we are going to say does not concern your majesty."

The king, smiling, turned a few steps back.

"This is what I propose to do," said Athos. "We will divide our regiments into two squadrons. You will put yourself at the head of the first. We and his majesty will lead the second. If no obstacle occurs we will both charge together, force the enemy's line and throw ourselves into the Tyne, which we must cross, either by fording or swimming ; if, on the contrary, any repulse should take place, you and your men must fight to the last man, whilst we and the king proceed on our road. Once arrived at the brink of the river, should we even find them three ranks deep, as long as you and your regiment do your duty, we will look to the rest."

"To horse !" said Lord Winter.

"To horse !" re-echoed Athos ; "everything is arranged and decided."

"Now, gentlemen," cried the king, "forward ! and rally to the old cry of France, 'Montjoy and St. Denis !' The war cry of England is too often in the mouths of traitors."

They mounted — the king on Winter's horse and Winter on that of the king ; then Winter took his place at the head of the first squadron, and the king, with Athos on his right and Aramis on his left, at the head of the second.

The Scotch army stood motionless and silent, seized with shame at sight of these preparations.

Some of the chieftains left the ranks and broke their swords in two.

"There," said the king, "that consoles me; they are not all traitors."

At this moment Winter's voice was raised with the cry of "Forward!"

The first squadron moved off; the second followed, and descended from the plateau. A regiment of cuirassiers, nearly equal as to numbers, issued from behind the hill and came full gallop toward it.

The king pointed this out.

"Sire," said Athos, "we foresaw this; and if Lord Winter's men but do their duty, we are saved, instead of lost."

At this moment they heard above all the galloping and neighing of the horses Winter's voice crying out:

"Sword in hand!"

At these words every sword was drawn, and glittered in the air like lightning.

"Now, gentlemen," said the king in his turn, excited by this sight, "come, gentlemen, sword in hand!"

But Aramis and Athos were the only ones to obey this command and the king's example.

"We are betrayed," said the king in a low voice.

"Wait a moment," said Athos, "perhaps they do not recognize your majesty's voice, and await the order of their captain."

"Have they not heard that of their colonel? But look! look!" cried the king, drawing up his horse with a sudden jerk, which threw it on its haunches, and seizing the bridle of Athos's horse.

"Ah, cowards! traitors!" screamed Lord Winter, whose voice they heard, whilst his men, quitting their ranks, dispersed all over the plain.

About fifteen men were ranged around him and awaited the charge of Cromwell's cuirassiers.

"Let us go and die with them!" said the king.

"Let us go," said Athos and Aramis.

"All faithful hearts with me!" cried out Winter.

This voice was heard by the two friends, who set off, full gallop.

"No quarter!" cried a voice in French, answering to that of Winter, which made them tremble.

As for Winter, at the sound of that voice he turned pale, and was, as it were, petrified.

It was the voice of a cavalier mounted on a magnificent black horse, who was charging at the head of the English regiment, of which, in his ardor, he was ten steps in advance.

"'Tis he!" murmured Winter; his eyes glazed and he allowed his sword to fall to his side.

"The king! the king!" cried out several voices, deceived by the blue ribbon and chestnut horse of Winter; "take him alive."

"No! it is not the king!" exclaimed the cavalier. "Lord Winter, you are not the king; you are my uncle."

At the same moment Mordaunt, for it was he, leveled his pistol at Winter; it went off and the ball entered the heart of the old cavalier, who with one bound on his saddle fell back into the arms of Athos, murmuring: "He is avenged!"

"Think of my mother!" shouted Mordaunt, as his horse plunged and darted off at full gallop.

"Wretch!" exclaimed Aramis, raising his pistol as he passed by him; but the powder flashed in the pan and it did not go off.

At this moment the whole regiment came up and they fell upon the few men who had held out, surrounding the two Frenchmen. Athos, after making sure that Lord Winter was really dead, let fall the corpse and said:

"Come, Aramis, now for the honor of France!" and the two Englishmen who were nearest to them fell, mortally wounded.

At the same moment a fearful "hurrah!" rent the air and thirty blades glittered about their heads.

Suddenly a man sprang out of the English ranks, fell upon Athos, twined arms of steel around him, and tearing his sword from him, said in his ear :

"Silence! yield—you yield to me, do you not?"

A giant had seized also Aramis's two wrists, who struggled in vain to release himself from this formidable grasp.

"D'Art——" exclaimed Athos, whilst the Gascon covered his mouth with his hand.

"I am your prisoner," said Aramis, giving up his sword to Porthos.

"Fire, fire!" cried Mordaunt, returning to the group surrounding the two friends.

"And wherefore fire?" said the colonel; "every one has yielded."

"It is the son of Milady," said Athos to D'Artagnan.

"I recognize him."

"It is the monk," whispered Porthos to Aramis.

"I know it."

And now the ranks began to open. D'Artagnan held the bridle of Athos's horse and Porthos that of Aramis. Both of them attempted to lead his prisoner off the battle-field.

This movement revealed the spot where Winter's body had fallen. Mordaunt had found it out and was gazing on his dead relative with an expression of malignant hatred.

Athos, though now cool and collected, put his hand to his belt, where his loaded pistols yet remained.

"What are you about?" said D'Artagnan.

"Let me kill him."

"We are all four lost, if by the least gesture you discover that you recognize him."

Then turning to the young man he exclaimed :

"A fine prize! a fine prize, friend Mordaunt; we have, both myself and Monsieur du Vallon, taken two Knights of the Garter, nothing less."

"But," said Mordaunt, looking at Athos and Aramis with bloodshot eyes, "these are Frenchmen, I imagine."

"I'faith, I don't know. Are you French, sir?" said he to Athos.

"I am," replied the latter, gravely.

"Very well, my dear sir, you are the prisoner of a fellow countryman."

"But the king — where is the king?" exclaimed Athos, anxiously.

D'Artagnan vigorously seized his prisoner's hand, saying:

"Eh! the king? We have secured him."

"Yes," said Aramis, "through an infamous act of treason."

Porthos pressed his friend's hand and said to him:

"Yes, sir, all is fair in war, stratagem as well as force; look yonder!"

At this instant the squadron, that ought to have protected Charles's retreat, was advancing to meet the English regiments. The king, who was entirely surrounded, walked alone in a great empty space. He appeared calm, but it was evidently not without a mighty effort. Drops of perspiration trickled down his face and from time to time he put a handkerchief to his mouth to wipe away the blood that rilled from it.

"Behold Nebuchadnezzar!" exclaimed an old Puritan soldier, whose eyes flashed at the sight of the man they called the tyrant.

"Do you call him Nebuchadnezzar?" said Mordaunt, with a terrible smile; "no, it is Charles the First, the king, the good King Charles, who despoils his subjects to enrich himself."

Charles glanced a moment at the insolent creature who uttered this, but did not recognize him. Nevertheless, the calm religious dignity of his countenance abashed Mordaunt.

"*Bon jour*, messieurs!" said the king to the two gentlemen who were held by D'Artagnan and Porthos. "The day has been unfortunate, but it is not your fault, thank God! But where is my old friend, Winter?"

The two gentlemen turned away their heads in silence.

"In Strafford's company," said Mordaunt, tauntingly.

Charles shuddered. The demon had known how to wound him. The remembrance of Strafford was a source of lasting

remorse to him, the shadow that haunted him by day and night. The king looked around him. He saw a corpse at his feet. It was Winter's. He uttered not a word, nor shed a tear, but a deadly pallor spread over his face; he knelt down on the ground, raised Winter's head, and unfastening the Order of the Saint Esprit, placed it on his own breast.

"Lord Winter is killed, then?" inquired D'Artagnan, fixing his eyes on the corpse.

"Yes," said Athos, "by his own nephew."

"Come, he was the first of us to go; peace be to him! he was an honest man," said D'Artagnan.

"Charles Stuart," said the colonel of the English regiment, approaching the king, who had just put on the insignia of royalty, "do you yield yourself a prisoner?"

Colonel Tomlison," said Charles, "kings cannot yield; the man alone submits to force."

"Your sword."

The king drew his sword and broke it on his knee.

At this moment a horse without a rider, covered with foam, his nostrils extended and eyes all fire, galloped up, and recognizing his master, stopped and neighed with pleasure; it was Arthur.

The king smiled, patted it with his hand and jumped lightly into the saddle.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "conduct me where you will."

Turning back again, he said, "I thought I saw Winter move; if he still lives, by all you hold most sacred, do not abandon him."

"Never fear, King Charles," said Mordaunt, "the bullet pierced his heart."

"Do not breathe a word nor make the least sign to me or Porthos," said D'Artagnan to Athos and Aramis, "that you recognize this man, for Milady is not dead; her soul lives in the body of this demon."

The detachment now moved toward the town with the

royal captive; but on the road an aide-de-camp, from Cromwell, sent orders that Colonel Tomlison should conduct him to Holdenby Castle.

At the same time couriers started in every direction over England and Europe to announce that Charles Stuart was the prisoner of Oliver Cromwell.

CHAPTER LVII.

OLIVER CROMWELL.

"HAVE you been to the general?" said Mordaunt to D'Artagnan and Porthos; "you know he sent for you after the action."

"We want first to put our prisoners in a place of safety," replied D'Artagnan. "Do you know, sir, these gentlemen are each of them worth fifteen hundred pounds?"

"Oh, be assured," said Mordaunt, looking at them with an expression he vainly endeavored to soften, "my soldiers will guard them, and guard them well, I promise you."

"I shall take better care of them myself," answered D'Artagnan; "besides, all they require is a good room, with sentinels, or their simple parole that they will not attempt escape. I will go and see about that and then we shall have the honor of presenting ourselves to the general and receiving his commands for his eminence."

"You think of starting at once, then?" inquired Mordaunt.

"Our mission is ended and there is nothing more to detain us now but the good pleasure of the great man to whom we were sent."

The young man bit his lips and whispered to his sergeant:

"You will follow these men and not lose sight of them; when you have discovered where they lodge, come and await me at the town gate."

The sergeant made a sign of comprehension.

Instead of following the knot of prisoners that were being taken into the town, Mordaunt turned his steps toward the rising ground from whence Cromwell had witnessed the battle and on which he had just had his tent pitched.

Cromwell had given orders that no one was to be allowed admission ; but the sentinel, who knew that Mordaunt was one of the most confidential friends of the general, thought the order did not extend to the young man. Mordaunt, therefore, raised the canvas, and saw Cromwell seated before a table, his head buried in his hands, his back being turned.

Whether he heard Mordaunt or not as he entered, Cromwell did not move. Mordaunt remained standing near the door. At last, after a few moments, Cromwell raised his head, and as if he divined that some one was there, turned slowly around.

"I said I wished to be alone," he exclaimed, on seeing the young man.

"They thought this order did not concern me, sir ; nevertheless, if you wish it, I am ready to go."

"Ah ! is it you, Mordaunt ?" said Cromwell, the cloud passing away from his face ; "since you are here, it is well ; you may remain."

"I come to congratulate you."

"To congratulate me — what for ?"

"On the capture of Charles Stuart. You are now master of England."

"I was much more really so two hours ago."

"How so, general ?"

"Because England had need of me to take the tyrant and now the tyrant is taken. Have you seen him ?"

"Yes, sir," said Mordaunt.

"What is his bearing ?"

Mordaunt hesitated ; but it seemed as though he was constrained to tell the truth.

"Calm and dignified," said he.

"What did he say ?"

"Some parting words to his friends."

"His friends !" murmured Cromwell. "*Has* he any friends ?" Then he added aloud, "Did he make any resistance ?"

"No, sir ; with the exception of two or three friends, every one deserted him ; he had no means of resistance."



"To whom did he give up his sword?"

"He did not give it up; he broke it."

"He did well; but instead of breaking it, he might have used it to still more advantage."

There was a momentary pause.

"I heard that the colonel of the regiment that escorted Charles was killed," said Cromwell, staring very fixedly at Mordaunt.

"Yes, sir."

"By whom?" inquired Cromwell.

"By me."

"What was his name?"

"Lord Winter."

"Your uncle?" exclaimed Cromwell.

"My uncle," answered Mordaunt; "but traitors to England are no longer members of my family."

Cromwell observed the young man a moment in silence, then, with that profound melancholy Shakespeare describes so well:

"Mordaunt," he said, "you are a terrible servant."

"When the Lord commands," said Mordaunt, "His commands are not to be disputed. Abraham raised the knife against Isaac, and Isaac was his son."

"Yes," said Cromwell, "but the Lord did not suffer that sacrifice to be accomplished."

"I have looked around me," said Mordaunt, "and I have seen neither goat nor kid caught among the bushes of the plain."

Cromwell bowed. "You are strong among the strong, Mordaunt," he said; "and the Frenchmen, how did they behave?"

"Most fearlessly."

"Yes, yes," murmured Cromwell; "the French fight well; and if my glass was good and I mistake not, they were foremost in the fight."

"They were," replied Mordaunt.

"After you, however," said Cromwell.

"It was the fault of their horses, not theirs."

Another pause.

"And the Scotch?"

"They kept their word and never stirred," said Mordaunt.

"Wretched men!"

"Their officers wish to see you, sir."

"I have no time to see them. Are they paid?"

"Yes, to-night."

"Let them be off and return to their own country, there to hide their shame, if its hills are high enough; I have nothing more to do with them nor they with me. And now go, Mordaunt."

"Before I go," said Mordaunt, "I have some questions and a favor to ask you, sir."

"A favor from me?"

Mordaunt bowed.

"I come to you, my leader, my head, my father, and I ask you, master, are you contented with me?"

Cromwell looked at him with astonishment. The young man remained immovable.

"Yes," said Cromwell; "you have done, since I knew you, not only your duty, but more than your duty; you have been a faithful friend, a cautious negotiator, a brave soldier."

"Do you remember, sir, it was my idea, the Scotch treaty, for giving up the king?"

"Yes, the idea was yours. I had no such contempt for men before."

"Was I not a good ambassador in France?"

"Yes, for Mazarin has granted what I desire."

"Have I not always fought for your glory and interests?"

"Too ardently, perhaps; it is what I have just reproached you for. But what is the meaning of all these questions?"

"To tell you, my lord, that the moment has now arrived when, with a single word, you may recompense all these services."

"Oh!" said Oliver, with a slight curl of his lip, "I forgot

that every service merits some reward and that up to this moment you have not been paid."

"Sir, I can take my pay at this moment, to the full extent of my wishes."

"How is that?"

"I have the payment under my hand; I almost possess it."

"What is it? Have they offered you money? Do you wish a step, or some place in the government?"

"Sir, will you grant me my request?"

"Let us hear what it is, first."

"Sir, when you have told me to obey an order did I ever answer, 'Let me see that order?'"

"If, however, your wish should be one impossible to fulfill?"

"When you have cherished a wish and have charged me with its fulfillment, have I ever replied, 'It is impossible?'"

"But a request preferred with so much preparation ——"

"Ah! do not fear, sir," said Mordaunt, with apparent simplicity, "it will not ruin you."

"Well, then," said Cromwell, "I promise, as far as lies in my power, to grant your request; proceed."

"Sir, two prisoners were taken this morning, will you let me have them?"

"For their ransom? have they then offered a large one?" inquired Cromwell.

"On the contrary, I think they are poor, sir."

"They are friends of yours, then?"

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Mordaunt, "they are friends, dear friends of mine, and I would lay down my life for them."

"Very well, Mordaunt," exclaimed Cromwell, pleased at having his opinion of the young man raised once more; "I will give them to you; I will not even ask who they are; do as you like with them."

"Thank you, sir!" exclaimed Mordaunt, "thank you; my life is always at your service and should I lose it I should still owe you something; thank you; you have indeed repaid me munificently for my services."

He threw himself at the feet of Cromwell and in spite of the efforts of the Puritan general, who did not like this almost kingly homage, he took his hand and kissed it.

"What!" said Cromwell, arresting him for a moment as he arose; "is there nothing more you wish? neither gold nor rank?"

"You have given me all you can give me and from to-day your debt is paid."

And Mordaunt darted out of the general's tent, his heart beating and his eyes sparkling with joy.

Cromwell gazed a moment after him.

"He has slain his uncle!" he murmured. "Alas! what are my servants? Possibly this one, who asks nothing or seems to ask nothing, has asked more in the eyes of Heaven than those who tax the country and steal the bread of the poor. Nobody serves me for nothing. Charles, who is my prisoner, may still have friends, but I have none!"

And with a deep sigh he again sank into the reverie that had been interrupted by Mordaunt.

CHAPTER LVIII.

JESUS SEIGNEUR.

WHILST Mordaunt was making his way to Cromwell's tent, D'Artagnan and Porthos had brought their prisoners to the house which had been assigned to them as their dwelling at Newcastle.

The order given by Mordaunt to the sergeant had been heard by D'Artagnan, who accordingly, by an expressive glance, warned Athos and Aramis to exercise extreme caution. The prisoners, therefore, had remained silent as they marched along in company with their conquerors — which they could do with the less difficulty since each of them had occupation enough in answering his own thoughts.

It would be impossible to describe Musqueton's astonishment when from the threshold of the door he saw the four friends approaching, followed by a sergeant with a dozen men. He rubbed his eyes, doubting if he really saw before him Athos and Aramis; and forced at last to yield to evidence, he was on the point of breaking forth in exclamations when he encountered a glance from the eyes of Porthos, the repressive force of which he was not inclined to dispute.

Musqueton remained glued to the door, awaiting the explanation of this strange occurrence. What upset him completely was that the four friends seemed to have no acquaintance with one another.

The house to which D'Artagnan and Porthos conducted Athos and Aramis was the one assigned to them by General Cromwell and of which they had taken possession on the

previous evening. It was at the corner of two streets and had in the rear, bordering on the side street, stables and a sort of garden. The windows on the ground floor, according to a custom in provincial villages, were barred, so that they strongly resembled the windows of a prison.

The two friends made the prisoners enter the house first, whilst they stood at the door, desiring Musqueton to take the four horses to the stable.

"Why don't we go in with them?" asked Porthos.

"We must first see what the sergeant wishes us to do," replied D'Artagnan.

The sergeant and his men took possession of the little garden.

D'Artagnan asked them what they wished and why they had taken that position.

"We have had orders," answered the man, "to help you in taking care of your prisoners."

There could be no fault to find with this arrangement; on the contrary, it seemed to be a delicate attention, to be gratefully received; D'Artagnan, therefore, thanked the man and gave him a crown piece to drink to General Cromwell's health.

The sergeant answered that Puritans never drank, and put the crown piece in his pocket.

"Ah!" said Porthos, "what a fearful day, my dear D'Artagnan!"

"What! a fearful day, when to-day we find our friends?"

"Yes; but under what circumstances?"

"'Tis true that our position is an awkward one; but let us go in and see more clearly what is to be done."

"Things look black enough," replied Porthos; "I understand now why Aramis advised me to strangle that horrible Mordaunt."

"Silence!" cried the Gascon; "do not utter that name."

"But," argued Porthos, "I speak French and they are all English."

D'Artagnan looked at Porthos with that air of wonder

which a cunning man cannot help feeling at displays of crass stupidity.

But as Porthos on his side could not comprehend his astonishment, he merely pushed him indoors, saying, "Let us go in."

They found Athos in profound despondency; Aramis looked first at Porthos and then at D'Artagnan, without speaking, but the latter understood his meaning look.

"You want to know how we came here? 'Tis easily guessed. Mazarin sent us with a letter to General Cromwell."

"But how came you to fall into company with Mordaunt, whom I bade you distrust?" asked Athos.

"And whom I advised you to strangle, Porthos," said Aramis.

"Mazarin again. Cromwell had sent him to Mazarin. Mazarin sent us to Cromwell. There is a certain fatality in it."

"Yes, you are right, D'Artagnan, a fatality that will separate and ruin us! So, my dear Aramis, say no more about it and let us prepare to submit to destiny."

"Zounds! on the contrary, let us speak about it; for it was agreed among us, once for all, that we should always hold together, though engaged on opposing sides."

"Yes," added Athos, "I now ask you, D'Artagnan, what side you are on? Ah! behold for what end the wretched Mazarin has made use of you. Do you know in what crime you are to-day engaged? In the capture of a king, his degradation and his murder."

"Oh! oh!" cried Porthos, "do you think so?"

"You are exaggerating, Athos; we are not so far gone as that," replied the lieutenant.

"Good heavens! we are on the very eve of it. I say, why is the king taken prisoner? Those who wish to respect him as a master would not buy him as a slave. Do you think it is to replace him on the throne that Cromwell has paid for him two hundred thousand pounds sterling? They will kill him, you may be sure of it."

"I don't maintain the contrary," said D'Artagnan. "But what's that to us? I am here because I am a soldier and have to obey orders—I have taken an oath to obey, and I do obey; but you who have taken no such oath, why are you here and what cause do you represent?"

"That most sacred in the world," said Athos; "the cause of misfortune, of religion, royalty. A friend, a wife, a daughter, have done us the honor to call us to their aid. We have served them to the best of our poor means and God will recompense the will, forgive the want of power. You may see matters differently, D'Artagnan, and think otherwise. I will not attempt to argue with you, but I blame you."

"Heyday!" cried D'Artagnan; "what matters it to me, after all, if Cromwell, who's an Englishman, revolts against his king, who is a Scotchman? I am myself a Frenchman. I have nothing to do with these things—why hold me responsible?"

"Yes," said Porthos.

"Because all gentlemen are brothers, because you are a gentleman, because the kings of all countries are the first among gentlemen, because the blind populace, ungrateful and brutal, always takes pleasure in pulling down what is above them. And you, you, D'Artagnan, a man sprung from the ancient nobility of France, bearing an honorable name, carrying a good sword, have helped to give up a king to beersellers, shopkeepers, and wagoners. Ah! D'Artagnan! perhaps you have done your duty as a soldier, but as a gentleman, I say that you are very culpable."

D'Artagnan was chewing the stalk of a flower, unable to reply and thoroughly uncomfortable; for when turned from the eyes of Athos he encountered those of Aramis.

"And you, Porthos," continued the count, as if in consideration for D'Artagnan's embarrassment, "you, the best heart, the best friend, the best soldier that I know—you, with a soul that makes you worthy of a birth on the steps of a throne and who, sooner or later, must receive your

reward from an intelligent king — you, my dear Porthos, you, a gentleman in manners, in tastes and in courage, you are as culpable as D'Artagnan."

Porthos blushed, but with pleasure rather than with confusion; and yet, bowing his head, as if humiliated, he said:

"Yes, yes, my dear count, I feel that you are right."

Athos arose.

"Come," he said, stretching out his hand to D'Artagnan, "come, don't be sullen, my dear son, for I have said all this to you, if not in the tone, at least with the feelings of a father. It would have been easier to me merely to have thanked you for preserving my life and not to have uttered a word of all this."

"Doubtless, doubtless, Athos. But here it is: you have sentiments, the devil knows what, such as every one can't entertain. Who could suppose that a sensible man could leave his house, France, his ward — a charming youth, for we saw him in the camp — to fly to the aid of a rotten, worm-eaten royalty, which is going to crumble one of these days like an old hovel. The sentiments you air are certainly fine, so fine that they are superhuman."

"However that may be, D'Artagnan," replied Athos, without falling into the snare which his Gascon friend had prepared for him by an appeal to his parental love, "however that may be, you know in the bottom of your heart that it is true; but I am wrong to dispute with my master. D'Artagnan, I am your prisoner — treat me as such."

"Ah! *pardieu!*" said D'Artagnan, "you know you will not be my prisoner very long."

"No," said Aramis, "they will doubtless treat us like the prisoners of the Philipghauts."

"And how were they treated?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Why," said Aramis, "one-half were hanged and the other half were shot."

"Well, I," said D'Artagnan, "I answer that while there remains a drop of blood in my veins you will be neither hanged nor shot. *Sang Dieu!* let them come on! Besides — do you see that door, Athos?"

"Yes; what then?"

"Well, you can go out by that door whenever you please; for from this moment you are free as the air."

"I recognize you there, my brave D'Artagnan," replied Athos; "but you are no longer our masters. That door is guarded, D'Artagnan; you know that."

"Very well, you will force it," said Porthos. "There are only a dozen men at the most."

"That would be nothing for us four; it is too much for us two. No, divided as we now are, we must perish. See the fatal example: on the Vendômois road, D'Artagnan, you so brave, and you, Porthos, so valiant and so strong — you were beaten; to-day Aramis and I are beaten in our turn. Now that never happened to us when we were four together. Let us die, then, as De Winter has died; as for me, I will fly only on condition that we all fly together."

"Impossible," said D'Artagnan; "we are under Mazarin's orders."

"I know it and I have nothing more to say; my arguments lead to nothing; doubtless they are bad, since they have not determined minds so just as yours."

"Besides," said Aramis, "had they taken effect it would be still better not to compromise two excellent friends like D'Artagnan and Porthos. Be assured, gentlemen, we shall do you honor in our dying. As for myself, I shall be proud to face the bullets, or even the rope, in company with you, Athos; for you have never seemed to me so grand as you are to-day."

D'Artagnan said nothing, but, after having gnawed the flower stalk, he began to bite his nails. At last:

"Do you imagine," he resumed, "that they mean to kill you? And wherefore should they do so? What interest have they in your death? Moreover, you are *our* prisoners."

"Fool!" cried Aramis; "knowest thou not, then, Mor-daunt? I have but exchanged with him one look, yet that look convinced me that we were doomed."

"The truth is, I'm very sorry that I did not strangle him as you advised me," said Porthos.

"Eh! I make no account of the harm Mordaunt can do!" cried D'Artagnan. "*Cap de Diou!* if he troubles me too much I will crush him, the insect! Do not fly, then. It is useless; for I swear to you that you are as safe here as you were twenty years ago—you, Athos, in the Rue Ferou, and you, Aramis, in the Rue de Vaugirard."

"Stop," cried Athos, extending his hand to one of the grated windows by which the room was lighted; "you will soon know what to expect, for here he is."

"Who?"

"Mordaunt."

In fact, looking at the place to which Athos pointed, D'Artagnan saw a cavalier coming toward the house at full gallop.

It was Mordaunt.

D'Artagnan rushed out of the room.

Porthos wanted to follow him.

"Stay," said D'Artagnan, "and do not come till you hear me drum my fingers on the door."

When Mordaunt arrived opposite the house he saw D'Artagnan on the threshold and the soldiers lying on the grass here and there, with their arms.

"Halloo!" he cried, "are the prisoners still there?"

"Yes, sir," answered the sergeant, uncovering.

"'Tis well; order four men to conduct them to my lodging."

Four men prepared to do so.

"What is it?" said D'Artagnan, with that jeering manner which our readers have so often observed in him since they made his acquaintance. "What is the matter, if you please?"

"Sir," replied Mordaunt, "I have ordered the two prisoners we made this morning to be conducted to my lodging."

"Wherefore, sir? Excuse curiosity, but I wish to be enlightened on the subject."

"Because these prisoners, sir, are at my disposal and I choose to dispose of them as I like."

"Allow me — allow me, sir," said D'Artagnan, "to observe you are in error. The prisoners belong to those who take them and not to those who only saw them taken. You might have taken Lord Winter — who, 'tis said, was your uncle — prisoner, but you preferred killing him; 'tis well; we, that is, Monsieur du Vallon and I, could have killed our prisoners — we preferred taking them."

Mordaunt's very lips grew white with rage.

D'Artagnan now saw that affairs were growing worse and he beat the guard's march upon the door. At the first beat Porthos rushed out and stood on the other side of the door.

This movement was observed by Mordaunt.

"Sir!" he thus addressed D'Artagnan; "your resistance is useless; these prisoners have just been given me by my illustrious patron, Oliver Cromwell."

These words struck D'Artagnan like a thunderbolt. The blood mounted to his temples, his eyes became dim; he saw from what fountainhead the ferocious hopes of the young man arose, and he put his hand to the hilt of his sword.

As for Porthos, he looked inquiringly at D'Artagnan.

This look of Porthos's made the Gascon regret that he had summoned the brute force of his friend to aid him in an affair which seemed to require chiefly cunning.

"Violence," he said to himself, "would spoil all; D'Artagnan, my friend, prove to this young serpent that thou art not only stronger, but more subtle than he is."

"Ah!" he said, making a low bow, "why did you not begin by saying that, Monsieur Mordaunt? What! are you sent by General Oliver Cromwell, the most illustrious captain of the age?"

"I have this instant left him," replied Mordaunt, alighting, in order to give his horse to a soldier to hold.

"Why did you not say so at once, my dear sir! all England is with Cromwell; and since you ask for my prisoners, I bend, sir, to your wishes. They are yours; take them."

Mordaunt, delighted, advanced, Porthos looking at D'Artagnan with open-mouthed astonishment. Then D'Artagnan

trod on his foot and Porthos began to understand that this was merely acting.

Mordaunt put his foot on the first step of the door and, with his hat in hand, prepared to pass by the two friends, motioning to the four men to follow him.

"But, pardon," said D'Artagnan, with the most charming smile and putting his hand on the young man's shoulder, "if the illustrious General Oliver Cromwell has disposed of our prisoners in your favor, he has, of course, made that act of donation in writing."

Mordaunt stopped short.

"He has given you some little writing for me — the least bit of paper which may show that you come in his name. Be pleased to give me that scrap of paper, so that I may justify, by a pretext at least, my abandoning my countrymen. Otherwise, you see, although I am sure that General Oliver Cromwell can intend them no harm, it would have a bad appearance."

Mordaunt recoiled; he felt the blow and discharged a terrible look at D'Artagnan, who responded by the most amiable expression that ever graced a human countenance.

"When I tell you a thing, sir," said Mordaunt, "you insult me by doubting it."

"I!" cried D'Artagnan, "I doubt what you say!" God keep me from it, my dear Monsieur Mordaunt! On the contrary, I take you to be a worthy and accomplished gentleman. And then, sir, do you wish me to speak freely to you?" continued D'Artagnan, with his frank expression.

"Speak out, sir," said Mordaunt.

"Monsieur du Vallon, yonder, is rich and has forty thousand francs yearly, so he does not care about money. I do not speak for him, but for myself."

"Well, sir? What more?"

"Well — I — I'm not rich. In Gascony 'tis no dishonor, sir, nobody is rich; and Henry IV., of glorious memory, who was the king of the Gascons, as His Majesty Philip IV. is the king of the Spaniards, never had a penny in his pocket."

"Go on, sir, I see what you wish to get at; and if it is simply what I think that stops you, I can obviate the difficulty."

"Ah, I knew well," said the Gascon, "that you were a man of talent. Well, here's the case, here's where the saddle hurts me, as we French say. I am an officer of fortune, nothing else; I have nothing but what my sword brings me in—that is to say, more blows than banknotes. Now, on taking prisoners, this morning, two Frenchmen, who seemed to me of high birth—in short, two knights of the Garter—I said to myself, my fortune is made. I say two, because in such circumstances Monsieur du Vallon, who is rich, always gives me his prisoners."

Mordaunt, completely deceived by the wordy civility of D'Artagnan, smiled like a man who understands perfectly the reasons given him, and said:

"I shall have the order signed directly, sir, and with it two thousand pistoles; meanwhile, let me take these men away."

"No," replied D'Artagnan; "what signifies a delay of half an hour? I am a man of order, sir; let us do things in order."

"Nevertheless," replied Mordaunt, "I could compel you; I command here."

"Ah, sir!" said D'Artagnan, "I see that although we have had the honor of traveling in your company you do not know us. We are gentlemen; we are, both of us, able to kill you and your eight men—we two only. For Heaven's sake don't be obstinate, for when others are obstinate I am obstinate likewise, and then I become ferocious and headstrong; and there's my friend, who is even more headstrong and ferocious than myself. Besides, we are sent here by Cardinal Mazarin, and at this moment represent both the king and the cardinal, and are, therefore, as ambassadors, able to act with impunity, a thing that General Oliver Cromwell, who is assuredly as great a politician as he is a general, is quite the man to understand. Ask him, then,

for the written order. What will that cost you, my dear Monsieur Mordaunt ? ”

“ Yes, the written order,” said Porthos, who now began to comprehend what D’Artagnan was aiming at, “ we ask only for that.”

However inclined Mordaunt was to have recourse to violence, he understood the reasons D’Artagnan had given him ; besides, completely ignorant of the friendship which existed between the four Frenchmen, all his uneasiness disappeared when he heard of the plausible motive of the ransom. He decided, therefore, not only to fetch the order, but the two thousand pistoles, at which he estimated the prisoners. He therefore mounted his horse and disappeared.

“ Good ! ” thought D’Artagnan ; “ a quarter of an hour to go to the tent, a quarter of an hour to return ; it is more than we need.” Then turning, without the least change of countenance, to Porthos, he said, looking him full in the face : “ Friend Porthos, listen to this ; first, not a syllable to either of our friends of what you have heard ; it is unnecessary for them to know the service we are going to render them.”

“ Very well ; I understand.”

“ Go to the stable ; you will find Musqueton there ; saddle your horses, put your pistols in your saddle-bags, take out the horses and lead them to the street below this, so that there will be nothing to do but mount them ; all the rest is my business.”

Porthos made no remark, but obeyed, with the sublime confidence he had in his friend.

“ I go,” he said ; “ only, shall I enter the chamber where those gentlemen are ? ”

“ No, it is not worth while.”

“ Well, do me the kindness to take my purse, which I left on the mantelpiece.”

“ All right.”

He then proceeded, with his usual calm gait, to the stable and went into the very midst of the soldiery, who, foreigner as he was, could not help admiring his height and the enormous strength of his great limbs.

At the corner of the street he met Musqueton and took him with him.

D'Artagnan, meantime, went into the house, whistling a tune which he had begun before Porthos went away.

"My dear Athos, I have reflected on your arguments and I am convinced. I am sorry to have had anything to do with this matter. As you say, Mazarin is a knave. I have resolved to fly with you; not a word — be ready. Your swords are in the corner; do not forget them, they are in many circumstances very useful; there is Porthos's purse, too."

He put it into his pocket. The two friends were perfectly stupefied.

"Well, pray, is there anything to be so surprised at?" he said. "I was blind; Athos has made me see, that's all; come here."

The two friends went near him.

"Do you see that street? There are the horses. Go out by the door, turn to the right, jump into your saddles, all will be right; don't be uneasy at anything except mistaking the signal. That will be the signal when I call out — *Jésus Seigneur!*"

"But give us your word that you will come, too, D'Artagnan," said Athos.

"I swear I will, by Heaven."

"'Tis settled," said Aramis; "at the cry '*Jésus Seigneur*' we go out, upset all that stands in our way, run to our horses, jump into our saddles, spur them; is that all?"

"Exactly."

"See, Aramis, as I have told you, D'Artagnan is first amongst us all," said Athos.

"Very true," replied the Gascon, "but I always run away from compliments. Don't forget the signal: '*Jésus Seigneur!*'" and he went out as he came in, whistling the self-same air.

The soldiers were playing or sleeping; two of them were singing in a corner, out of tune, the psalm: "On the rivers of Babylon."

D'Artagnan called the sergeant. "My dear friend, General Cromwell has sent Monsieur Mordaunt to fetch me. Guard the prisoners well, I beg of you."

The sergeant made a sign, as much as to say he did not understand French, and D'Artagnan tried to make him comprehend by signs and gestures. Then he went into the stable; he found the five horses saddled, his own amongst the rest.

"Each of you take a horse by the bridle," he said to Porthos and Musqueton; "turn to the left, so that Athos and Aramis may see you clearly from the window."

"They are coming, then?" said Porthos.

"In a moment."

"You didn't forget my purse?"

"No; be easy."

"Good."

Porthos and Musqueton each took a horse by the bridle and proceeded to their post.

Then D'Artagnan, being alone, struck a light and lighted a small bit of tinder, mounted his horse and stopped at the door in the midst of the soldiers. There, caressing, as he pretended, the animal with his hand, he put this bit of burning tinder in his ear. It was necessary to be as good a horseman as he was to risk such a scheme, for no sooner had the animal felt the burning tinder than he uttered a cry of pain and reared and jumped as if he had been mad.

The soldiers, whom he was nearly trampling, ran away.

"Help! help!" cried D'Artagnan, "stop — my horse has the staggers."

In an instant the horse's eyes grew bloodshot and he was white with foam.

"Help!" cried D'Artagnan. "What! will you let me be killed? *Jésus Seigneur!*"

No sooner had he uttered this cry than the door opened and Athos and Aramis rushed out. The coast, owing to the Gascon's stratagem, was clear.

"The prisoners are escaping! the prisoners are escaping!" cried the sergeant.

"Stop! stop!" cried D'Artagnan, giving rein to his famous steed, who, darting forth, overturned several men.

"Stop! stop!" cried the soldiers, and ran for their arms.

But the prisoners were in their saddles and lost no time hastening to the nearest gate.

In the middle of the street they saw Grimaud and Blaisois, who were coming to find their masters. With one wave of his hand Athos made Grimaud, who followed the little troop, understand everything, and they passed on like a whirlwind, D'Artagnan still directing them from behind with his voice.

They passed through the gate like apparitions, without the guards thinking of detaining them, and reached the open country.

All this time the soldiers were calling out, "Stop! stop!" and the sergeant, who began to see that he was the victim of an artifice, was almost in a frenzy of despair. Whilst all this was going on, a cavalier in full gallop was seen approaching. It was Mordaunt with the order in his hand.

"The prisoners!" he exclaimed, jumping off his horse.

The sergeant had not the courage to reply; he showed him the open door, the empty room. Mordaunt darted to the steps, understood all, uttered a cry, as if his very heart was pierced, and fell fainting on the stone steps.

CHAPTER LIX.

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT UNDER THE MOST TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES NOBLE NATURES NEVER LOSE THEIR COURAGE, NOR GOOD STOMACHS THEIR APPETITES.

THE little troop, without looking behind them or exchanging a word, fled at a rapid gallop, fording a little stream, of which none of them knew the name, and leaving on their left a town which Athos declared to be Durham. At last they came in sight of a small wood, and spurring their horses afresh, rode in its direction.

As soon as they had disappeared behind a green curtain sufficiently thick to conceal them from the sight of any one who might be in pursuit they drew up to hold a council together. The two grooms held the horses, that they might take a little rest without being unsaddled, and Grimaud was posted as sentinel.

"Come, first of all," said Athos to D'Artagnan, "my friend, that I may shake hands with you — you, our rescuer — you, the true hero of us all."

"Athos is right — you have my adoration," said Aramis, in his turn pressing his hand. "To what are you not equal, with your superior intelligence, infallible eye, your arm of iron and your enterprising mind!"

"Now," said the Gascon, "that is all well, I accept for Porthos and myself everything — thanks and compliments; we have plenty of time to spare."

The two friends, recalled by D'Artagnan to what was also due to Porthos, pressed his hand in their turn.

"And now," said Athos, "it is not our plan to run anywhere and like madmen, but we must map up our campaign. What shall we do?"

"What are we going to do, i'faith? It is not very difficult to say."

"Tell us, then, D'Artagnan."

"We are going to reach the nearest seaport, unite our little resources, hire a vessel and return to France. As for me I will give my last sou for it. Life is the greatest treasure, and speaking candidly, ours hangs by a thread."

"What do you say to this, Du Vallon?"

"I," said Porthos, "I am entirely of D'Artagnan's opinion; this is a 'beastly' country, this England."

"You are quite decided, then, to leave it?" asked Athos of D'Artagnan.

"Egad! I don't see what is to keep me here."

A glance was exchanged between Athos and Aramis.

"Go, then, my friends," said the former, sighing.

"How, go then?" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "Let us go, you mean?"

"No, my friend," said Athos, "you must leave us."

"Leave you!" cried D'Artagnan, quite bewildered at this unexpected announcement.

"Bah!" said Porthos, "why separate, since we are all together?"

"Because you can and ought to return to France; your mission is accomplished, but ours is not."

"Your mission is not accomplished?" exclaimed D'Artagnan, looking in astonishment at Athos.

"No, my friend," replied Athos, in his gentle but decided voice, "we came here to defend King Charles; we have but ill defended him — it remains for us to save him!"

"To save the king?" said D'Artagnan, looking at Aramis as he had looked at Athos.

Aramis contented himself by making a sign with his head.

D'Artagnan's countenance took an expression of the deepest compassion; he began to think he had to do with madmen.

"You cannot be speaking seriously, Athos!" said he;

"the king is surrounded by an army, which is conducting him to London. This army is commanded by a butcher, or the son of a butcher — it matters little — Colonel Harrison. His majesty, I can assure you, will be tried on his arrival in London ; I have heard enough from the lips of Oliver Cromwell to know what to expect."

A second look was exchanged between Athos and Aramis.

"And when the trial is ended there will be no delay in putting the sentence into execution," continued D'Artagnan.

"And to what penalty do you think the king will be condemned ?" asked Athos.

"The penalty of death, I greatly fear ; they have gone too far for him to pardon them and there is nothing left to them but one thing, and that is to kill him. Have you never heard what Oliver Cromwell said when he came to Paris and was shown the dungeon at Vincennes where Monsieur de Vendôme was imprisoned ?"

"What did he say ?" asked Porthos.

"Princes must be knocked on the head."

"I remember it," said Athos.

"And you fancy he will not put his maxim into execution, now that he has got hold of the king ?"

"On the contrary, I am certain he will do so. But then that is all the more reason why we should not abandon the august head so threatened."

"Athos, you are becoming mad."

"No, my friend," Athos gently replied, "but De Winter sought us out in France and introduced us, Monsieur d'Herblay and myself, to Madame Henrietta. Her majesty did us the honor to ask our aid for her husband. We engaged our word ; our word included everything. It was our strength, our intelligence, our life, in short, that we promised. • It remains now for us to keep our word. Is that your opinion, D'Herblay ?"

"Yes," said Aramis, "we have promised."

"Then," continued Athos, "we have another reason ; it is this — listen : In France at this moment everything is poor

and paltry. We have a king ten years old, who doesn't yet know what he wants; we have a queen blinded by a belated passion; we have a minister who governs France as he would govern a great farm — that is to say, intent only on turning out all the gold he can by the exercise of Italian cunning and invention; we have princes who set up a personal and egotistic opposition, who will draw from Mazarin's hands only a few ingots of gold or some shreds of power granted as bribes. I have served them without enthusiasm — God knows that I estimated them at their real value, and that they are not high in my esteem — but on principle. To-day I am engaged in a different affair. I have encountered misfortune in a high place, a royal misfortune, a European misfortune; I attach myself to it. If we can succeed in saving the king it will be good; if we die for him it will be grand."

"So you know beforehand you must perish!" said D'Artagnan.

"We fear so, and our only regret is to die so far from both of *you*."

"What will you do in a foreign land, an enemy's country?"

"I traveled in England when I was young, I speak English like an Englishman, and Aramis, too, knows something of the language. Ah! if we had you, my friends! With you, D'Artagnan, with you, Porthos — all four, reunited for the first time for twenty years — we would dare not only England, but the three kingdoms put together!"

"And did you promise the queen," resumed D'Artagnan, petulantly, "to storm the Tower of London, to kill a hundred thousand soldiers, to fight victoriously against the wishes of the nation and the ambition of a man, and when that man is Cromwell? Do not exaggerate your duty. In Heaven's name, my dear Athos, do not make a useless sacrifice. When I see you merely, you look like a reasonable being; when you speak, I seem to have to do with a madman. Come, Porthos, join me; say frankly, what do you think of this business?"

"Nothing good," replied Porthos.

"Come," continued D'Artagnan, who, irritated that instead of listening to him Athos seemed to be attending to his own thoughts, "you have never found yourself the worse for my advice. Well, then, believe me, Athos, your mission is ended, and ended nobly; return to France with us."

"Friend," said Athos, "our resolution is irrevocable."

"Then you have some other motive unknown to us?"

Athos smiled and D'Artagnan struck his hands together in anger and muttered the most convincing reasons that he could discover; but to all these reasons Athos contented himself by replying with a calm, sweet smile and Aramis by nodding his head.

"Very well," cried D'Artagnan, at last, furious, "very well; since you wish it, let us leave our bones in this beggarly land, where it is always cold, where fine weather is a fog, fog is rain, and rain a deluge; where the sun represents the moon and the moon a cream cheese; in truth, whether we die here or elsewhere, matters little, since we must die."

"Only reflect, my good fellow," said Athos, "it is but dying rather sooner."

"Pooh! a little sooner or a little later, it isn't worth quarreling over."

"If I am astonished at anything," remarked Porthos, sententiously, "it is that it has not already happened."

"Oh, it will happen, you may be sure," said D'Artagnan. "So it is agreed, and if Porthos makes no objection ——"

"I," said Porthos, "I will do whatever you please; and besides, I think what the Comte de la Fère said just now is very good."

"But your future career, D'Artagnan — your ambition, Porthos?"

"Our future, our ambition!" replied D'Artagnan, with feverish volubility. "Need we think of that since we are to save the king? The king saved — we shall assemble our friends together — we will head the Puritans — reconquer England; we shall re-enter London — place him securely on his throne ——"

"And he will make us dukes and peers," said Porthos, whose eyes sparkled with joy at this imaginary prospect.

"Or he will forget us," added D'Artagnan.

"Oh!" said Porthos.

"Well, that has happened, friend Porthos. It seems to me that we once rendered Anne of Austria a service not much less than that which to-day we are trying to perform for Charles I.; but, none the less, Anne of Austria has forgotten us for twenty years."

"Well, in spite of that, D'Artagnan," said Athos, "you are not sorry that you were useful to her?"

"No, indeed," said D'Artagnan; "I admit even that in my darkest moments I find consolation in that remembrance."

"You see, then, D'Artagnan, though princes often are ungrateful, God never is."

"Athos," said D'Artagnan, "I believe that were you to fall in with the devil, you would conduct yourself so well that you would take him with you to Heaven."

"So, then?" said Athos, offering his hand to D'Artagnan.

"'Tis settled," replied D'Artagnan. "I find England a charming country, and I stay — but on one condition only."

"What is it?"

"That I am not forced to learn English."

"Well, now," said Athos, triumphantly, "I swear to you, my friend, by the God who hears us — I believe that there is a power watching over us, and that we shall all four see France again."

"So be it!" said D'Artagnan, "but I — I confess I have a contrary conviction."

"Our good D'Artagnan," said Aramis, "represents among us the opposition in parliament, which always says *no*, and always does *aye*."

"But in the meantime saves the country," added Athos.

"Well, now that everything is decided," cried Porthos, rubbing his hands, "suppose we think of dinner! It seems to me that in the most critical positions of our lives we have always dined."

"Oh! yes, speak of dinner in a country where for a feast they eat boiled mutton, and as a treat drink beer. What the devil did you come to such a country for, Athos? But I forgot," added the Gascon, smiling, "pardon, I forgot you are no longer Athos; but never mind, let us hear your plan for dinner, Porthos."

"My plan!"

"Yes, have you a plan?"

"No! I am hungry, that is all."

"*Pardieu*, if that is all, I am hungry, too; but it is not everything to be hungry, one must find something to eat, unless we browse on the grass, like our horses——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Aramis, who was not quite so indifferent to the good things of the earth as Athos, "do you remember, when we were at Parpaillot, the beautiful oysters that we ate?"

"And the legs of mutton of the salt marshes," said Porthos, smacking his lips.

"But," suggested D'Artagnan, "have we not our friend Musqueton, who managed for us so well at Chantilly, Porthos?"

"Yes," said Porthos, "we have Musqueton, but since he has been steward, he has become very heavy; never mind, let us call him, and to make sure that he will reply agreeably——"

"Here! Mouston," cried Porthos.

Mouston appeared, with a most piteous face.

"What is the matter, my dear M. Mouston?" asked D'Artagnan. "Are you ill?"

"Sir, I am very hungry," replied Mouston.

"Well, it is just for that reason that we have called you, my good M. Mouston. Could you not procure us a few of those nice little rabbits, and some of those delicious partridges, of which you used to make fricassees at the hotel——? 'Faith, I do not remember the name of the hotel."

"At the hotel of ——," said Porthos; "by my faith——nor do I remember it either."

"It does not matter; and a few of those bottles of old Burgundy wine, which cured your master so quickly of his sprain!"

"Alas! sir," said Musqueton, "I much fear that what you ask for are very rare things in this detestable and barren country, and I think we should do better to go and seek hospitality from the owner of a little house we see on the fringe of the forest."

"How! is there a house in the neighborhood?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes, sir," replied Musqueton.

"Well, let us, as you say, go and ask a dinner from the master of that house. What is your opinion, gentlemen, and does not M. Mouston's suggestion appear to you full of sense?"

"Oh!" said Aramis, "suppose the master is a Puritan?"

"So much the better, *mordieux!*" replied D'Artagnan; "if he is a Puritan we will inform him of the capture of the king, and in honor of the news he will kill for us his fatted hens."

"But if he should be a cavalier?" said Porthos.

"In that case we will put on an air of mourning and he will pluck for us his black fowls."

"You are very happy," exclaimed Athos, laughing, in spite of himself, at the sally of the irresistible Gascon; "for you see the bright side of everything."

"What would you have?" said D'Artagnan. "I come from a land where there is not a cloud in the sky."

"It is not like this, then," said Porthos, stretching out his hand to assure himself whether a chill sensation he felt on his cheek was not really caused by a drop of rain.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan, "more reason why we should start on our journey. Halloo, Grimaud!"

Grimaud appeared.

"Well, Grimaud, my friend, have you seen anything?" asked the Gascon.

"Nothing!" replied Grimaud.

"Those idiots!" cried Porthos, "they have not even pursued us. Oh! if we had been in their place!"

"Yes, they are wrong," said D'Artagnan. "I would willingly have said two words to Mordaunt in this little desert. It is an excellent spot for bringing down a man in proper style."

"I think, decidedly," observed Aramis, "gentlemen, that the son hasn't his mother's energy."

"What, my good fellow!" replied Athos, "wait awhile; we have scarcely left him two hours ago — he does not know yet in what direction we came nor where we are. We may say that he is not equal to his mother when we put foot in France, if we are not poisoned or killed before then."

"Meanwhile, let us dine," suggested Porthos.

"I'faith, yes," said Athos, "for I am hungry."

"Look out for the black fowls!" cried Aramis.

And the four friends, guided by Musqueton, took up the way toward the house, already almost restored to their former gayety; for they were now, as Athos had said, all four once more united and of single mind.

CHAPTER LX.

RESPECT TO FALLEN MAJESTY.

As our fugitives approached the house, they found the ground cut up, as if a considerable body of horsemen had preceded them. Before the door the traces were yet more apparent; these horsemen, whoever they might be, had halted there.

"Egad!" cried D'Artagnan, "it's quite clear that the king and his escort have been by here."

"The devil!" said Porthos; "in that case they have eaten everything."

"Bah!" said D'Artagnan, "they will have left a chicken, at least." He dismounted and knocked on the door. There was no response.

He pushed open the door and found the first room empty and deserted.

"Well?" cried Porthos.

"I can see nobody," said D'Artagnan. "Aha!"

"What?"

"Blood!"

At this word the three friends leaped from their horses and entered. D'Artagnan had already opened the door of the second room, and from the expression of his face it was clear that he there beheld some extraordinary object.

The three friends drew near and discovered a young man stretched on the ground, bathed in a pool of blood. It was evident that he had attempted to regain his bed, but had not had sufficient strength to do so.

Athos, who imagined that he saw him move, was the first to go up to him.

"Well?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Well, if he is dead," said Athos, "he has not been so long, for he is still warm. But no, his heart is beating. Ho, there, my friend!"

The wounded man heaved a sigh. D'Artagnan took some water in the hollow of his hand and threw it upon his face. The man opened his eyes, made an effort to raise his head, and fell back again. The wound was in the top of his skull and blood was flowing copiously.

Aramis dipped a cloth into some water and applied it to the gash. Again the wounded man opened his eyes and looked in astonishment at these strangers, who appeared to pity him.

"You are among friends," said Athos, in English; "so cheer up, and tell us, if you have the strength to do so, what has happened?"

"The king," muttered the wounded man, "the king is a prisoner."

"You have seen him?" asked Aramis, in the same language.

The man made no reply.

"Make your mind easy," resumed Athos, "we are all faithful servants of his majesty."

"Is what you tell me true?" asked the wounded man.

"On our honor as gentlemen."

"Then I may tell you all. I am brother to Parry, his majesty's lackey."

Athos and Aramis remembered that this was the name by which De Winter had called the man they had found in the passage of the king's tent.

"We know him," said Athos; "he never left the king."

"Yes, that is he. Well, he thought of me, when he saw the king was taken, and as they were passing before the house he begged in the king's name that they would stop, as the king was hungry. They brought him into this room and placed sentinels at the doors and windows. Parry knew this room, as he had often been to see me when the

king was at Newcastle. He knew that there was a trap-door communicating with a cellar, from which one could get into the orchard. He made me a sign, which I understood, but the king's guards must have noticed it and held themselves on guard. I went out as if to fetch wood, passed through the subterranean passage into the cellar, and whilst Parry was gently bolting the door, pushed up the board and beckoned to the king to follow me. Alas! he would not. But Parry clasped his hands and implored him, and at last he agreed. I went on first, fortunately. The king was a few steps behind me, when suddenly I saw something rise up in front of me like a huge shadow. I wanted to cry out to warn the king, but that very moment I felt a blow as if the house was falling on my head, and fell insensible. When I came to myself again, I was stretched in the same place. I dragged myself as far as the yard. The king and his escort were no longer there. I spent perhaps an hour in coming from the yard to this place; then my strength gave out and I fainted again."

"And now how are you feeling?"

"Very ill," replied the wounded man.

"Can we do anything for you?" asked Athos.

"Help to put me on the bed; I think I shall feel better there."

"Have you any one to depend on for assistance?"

"My wife is at Durham and may return at any moment. But you — is there nothing that you want?"

"We came here with the intention of asking for something to eat."

"Alas, they have taken everything; there isn't a morsel of bread in the house."

"You hear, D'Artagnan?" said Athos; "we shall have to look elsewhere for our dinner."

"It is all one to me now," said D'Artagnan; "I am no longer hungry."

"Faith! neither am I," said Porthos.

They carried the man to his bed and called Grimaud to

dress the wound. In the service of the four friends Grimaud had had so frequent occasion to make lint and bandages that he had become something of a surgeon.

In the meantime the fugitives had returned to the first room, where they took counsel together.

"Now," said Aramis, "we know how the matter stands. The king and his escort have gone this way; we had better take the opposite direction, eh?"

Athos did not reply; he reflected.

"Yes," said Porthos, "let us take the opposite direction; if we follow the escort we shall find everything devoured, and die of hunger. What a confounded country this England is! This is the first time I have gone without my dinner for ten years, and it is generally my best meal."

"What do you think, D'Artagnan?" asked Athos. "Do you agree with Aramis?"

"Not at all," said D'Artagnan; "I am precisely of the contrary opinion."

"What! you would follow the escort?" exclaimed Porthos, in dismay.

"No, I would join the escort."

Athos's eyes shone with joy.

"Join the escort!" cried Aramis.

"Let D'Artagnan speak," said Athos; "you know he always has wise advice to give."

"Clearly," said D'Artagnan, "we must go where they will not look for us. Now, they will be far from looking for us among the Puritans; therefore, with the Puritans we must go."

"Good, my friend, good!" said Athos. "It is excellent advice. I was about to give it when you anticipated me."

"That, then, is your opinion?" asked Aramis.

"Yes. They will think we are trying to leave England and will search for us at the ports; meanwhile we shall reach London with the king. Once in London we shall be hard to find—without considering," continued Athos, throwing a glance at Aramis, "the chances that may come to us on the way."

"Yes," said Aramis, "I understand."

"I, however, do not understand," said Porthos. "But no matter; since it is at the same time the opinion of D'Artagnan and of Athos, it must be the best."

"But," said Aramis, "shall we not be suspected by Colonel Harrison?"

"Egad!" cried D'Artagnan, "he's just the man I count upon. Colonel Harrison is one of our friends. We have met him twice at General Cromwell's. He knows that we were sent from France by Monsieur Mazarin; he will consider us as brothers. Besides, is he not a butcher's son? Well, then, Porthos shall show him how to knock down an ox with a blow of the fist, and I how to trip up a bull by taking him by the horns. That will insure his confidence."

Athos smiled. "You are the best companion that I know, D'Artagnan," he said, offering his hand to the Gascon; "and I am very happy in having found you again, my dear son."

This was, as we have seen, the term which Athos applied to D'Artagnan in his more expansive moods.

At this moment Grimaud came in. He had stanced the wound and the man was better.

The four friends took leave of him and asked if they could deliver any message for him to his brother.

"Tell him," answered the brave man, "to let the king know that they have not killed me outright. However insignificant I am, I am sure that his majesty is concerned for me and blames himself for my death."

"Be easy," said D'Artagnan, "he will know all before night."

The little troop recommenced their march and at the end of two hours perceived a considerable body of horsemen about half a league ahead.

"My dear friends," said D'Artagnan, "give your swords to Monsieur Mouston, who will return them to you at the proper time and place, and do not forget you are our prisoners."

It was not long before they joined the escort. The king was riding in front, surrounded by troopers, and when he saw Athos and Aramis a glow of pleasure lighted his pale cheeks.

D'Artagnan passed to the head of the column, and leaving his friends under the guard of Porthos, went straight to Harrison, who recognized him as having met him at Cromwell's and received him as politely as a man of his breeding and disposition could. It turned out as D'Artagnan had foreseen. The colonel neither had nor could have any suspicion.

They halted for the king to dine. This time, however, due precautions were taken to prevent any attempt at escape. In the large room of the hotel a small table was placed for him and a large one for the officers.

"Will you dine with me?" asked Harrison of D'Artagnan.

"Gad, I should be very happy, but I have my companion, Monsieur du Vallon, and the two prisoners, whom I cannot leave. Let us manage it better. Have a table set for us in a corner and send us whatever you like from yours."

"Good," answered Harrison.

The matter was arranged as D'Artagnan had suggested and when he returned he found the king already seated at his little table, where Parry waited on him, Harrison and his officers sitting together at another table, and, in a corner, places reserved for himself and his companions.

The table at which the Puritan officers were seated was round, and whether by chance or coarse intention, Harrison sat with his back to the king.

The king saw the four gentlemen come in, but appeared to take no notice of them.

They sat down in such a manner as to turn their backs on nobody. The officers' table and that of the king were opposite to them.

"I'faith, colonel," said D'Artagnan, "we are very grateful for your gracious invitation; for without you we ran the risk of going without dinner, as we have without breakfast.

My friend here, Monsieur du Vallon, shares my gratitude, for he was particularly hungry."

"And I am so still," said Porthos, bowing to Harrison.

"And how," said Harrison, laughing, "did this serious calamity of going without breakfast happen to you?"

"In a very simple manner, colonel," said D'Artagnan. "I was in a hurry to join you and took the road you had already gone by. You can understand our disappointment when arriving at a pretty little house on the skirts of a wood, which at a distance had quite a gay appearance, with its red roof and green shutters, we found nothing but a poor wretch bathed — Ah! colonel, pay my respects to the officer of yours who struck that blow."

"Yes," said Harrison, laughing, and looking over at one of the officers seated at his table. "When Groslow undertakes this kind of thing there's no need to go over the ground a second time."

"Ah! it was this gentleman?" said D'Artagnan, bowing to the officer. "I am sorry he does not speak French, that I might tender him my compliments."

"I am ready to receive and return them, sir," said the officer, in pretty good French, "for I resided three years in Paris."

"Then, sir, allow me to assure you that your blow was so well directed that you have nearly killed your man."

"Nearly? I thought I had quite," said Groslow.

"No. It was a very near thing, but he is not dead."

As he said this, D'Artagnan gave a glance at Parry, who was standing in front of the king, to show him that the news was meant for him.

The king, who had listened in the greatest agony, now breathed a little truce.

"Two hours said Groslow, "I thought I had succeeded better half a 'were not so far from here to the house I would return to deannish him."

"And you would do well, if you are afraid of his recovering; for you know, if a wound in the head does not kill at once, it is cured in a week."

And D'Artagnan threw a second glance toward Parry, on whose face such an expression of joy was manifested that Charles stretched out his hand to him, smiling.

Parry bent over his master's hand and kissed it respectfully.

"I've a great desire to drink the king's health," said Athos.

"Let me propose it, then," said D'Artagnan.

"Do," said Aramis.

Porthos looked at D'Artagnan, quite amazed at the resources with which his companion's Gascon sharpness continually supplied him. D'Artagnan took up his camp tin cup, filled it with wine and arose.

"Gentlemen," said he, "let us drink to him who presides at the repast. Here's to our colonel, and let him know that we are always at his commands as far as London and farther."

And as D'Artagnan, as he spoke, looked at Harrison, the colonel imagined the toast was for himself. He arose and bowed to the four friends, whose eyes were fixed on Charles, while Harrison emptied his glass without the slightest misgiving.

The king, in return, looked at the four gentlemen and drank with a smile full of nobility and gratitude.

"Come, gentlemen," cried Harrison, regardless of his illustrious captive, "let us be off."

"Where do we sleep, colonel?"

"At Thirsk," replied Harrison.

"Parry," said the king, rising too, "my horse; I desire to go to Thirsk."

"Egad!" said D'Artagnan to Athos, "your king has thoroughly taken me and I am quite at his service."

"If what you say is sincere," replied Athos, "he will never reach London."

"How so?"

"Because before then we shall have carried him off."

"Well, this time, Athos," said D'Artagnan, "upon my word, you are mad."

"Have you some plan in your head then?" asked Aramis.

"Ay!" said Porthos, "the thing would not be impossible with a good plan."

"I have none," said Athos; "but D'Artagnan will discover one."

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders and they proceeded.

CHAPTER LXI.

D'ARTAGNAN HITS ON A PLAN.

As night closed in they arrived at Thirsk. The four friends appeared to be entire strangers to one another and indifferent to the precautions taken for guarding the king. They withdrew to a private house, and as they had reason every moment to fear for their safety, they occupied but one room and provided an exit, which might be useful in case of an attack. The lackeys were sent to their several posts, except that Grimaud lay on a truss of straw across the doorway.

D'Artagnan was thoughtful and seemed for the moment to have lost his usual loquacity. Porthos, who could never see anything that was not self-evident, talked to him as usual. He replied in monosyllables and Athos and Aramis looked significantly at one another.

Next morning D'Artagnan was the first to rise. He had been down to the stables, already taken a look at the horses and given the necessary orders for the day, whilst Athos and Aramis were still in bed and Porthos snoring.

At eight o'clock the march was resumed in the same order as the night before, except that D'Artagnan left his friends and began to renew the acquaintance which he had already struck up with Monsieur Groslow.

Groslow, whom D'Artagnan's praises had greatly pleased, welcomed him with a gracious smile.

"Really, sir," D'Artagnan said to him, "I am pleased to find one with whom to talk in my own poor tongue. My friend, Monsieur du Vallon, is of a very melancholy disposition, so much so, that one can scarcely get three words out of him all day. As for our two prisoners, you can imagine that they are but little in the vein for conversation."

"They are hot royalists," said Groslow.

"The more reason they should be sulky with us for having captured the Stuart, for whom, I hope, you're preparing a pretty trial."

"Why," said Groslow, "that is just what we are taking him to London for."

"And you never by any chance lose sight of him, I presume?"

"I should think not, indeed. You see he has a truly royal escort."

"Ay, there's no fear in the daytime; but at night?"

"We redouble our precautions."

"And what method of surveillance do you employ?"

"Eight men remain constantly in his room."

"The deuce, he is well guarded, then. But besides these eight men, you doubtless place some guard outside?"

"Oh, no! Just think. What would you have two men without arms do against eight armed men?"

"Two men — how do you mean?"

"Yes, the king and his lackey."

"Oh! then they allow the lackey to remain with him?"

"Yes; Stuart begged this favor and Harrison consented. Under pretense that he's a king it appears he cannot dress or undress without assistance."

"Really, captain," said D'Artagnan, determined to continue on the laudatory tack on which he had commenced, "the more I listen to you the more surprised I am at the easy and elegant manner in which you speak French. You have lived three years in Paris? May I ask what you were doing there?"

"My father, who is a merchant, placed me with his correspondent, who in turn sent his son to join our house in London."

"Were you pleased with Paris, sir?"

"Yes, but you are much in want of a revolution like our own — not against your king, who is a mere child, but against that *lazar* of an Italian, the queen's favorite."

"Ah! I am quite of your opinion, sir; and we should soon make an end of Mazarin if we had only a dozen officers like yourself, without prejudices, vigilant and incorruptible."

"But," said the officer, "I thought you were in his service and that it was he who sent you to General Cromwell."

"That is to say I am in the king's service, and that knowing he wanted to send some one to England, I solicited the appointment, so great was my desire to know the man of genius who now governs the three kingdoms. So that when he proposed to us to draw our swords in honor of old England you see how we snapped up the proposition."

"Yes, I know that you charged by the side of Mordaunt."

"On his right and left, sir. Ah! there's another brave and excellent young man."

"Do you know him?" asked the officer.

"Yes, very well. Monsieur du Vallon and myself came from France with him."

"It appears, too, you kept him waiting a long time at Boulogne."

"What would you have? I was like you, and had a king in keeping."

"Aha!" said Groslow; "what king?"

"Our own, to be sure, the little one — Louis XIV."

"And how long had you to take care of him?"

"Three nights; and, by my troth, I shall always remember those three nights with a certain pleasure."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that my friends, officers in the guards and *mousquetaires*, came to keep me company and we passed the night in feasting, drinking, dicing."

"Ah! true," said the Englishman, with a sigh; "you Frenchmen are born boon companions."

"And don't you play, too, when you are on guard?"

"Never," said the Englishman.

"In that case you must be horribly bored, and have my sympathy."

"The fact is, I look to my turn for keeping guard with horror. It's tiresome work to keep awake a whole night."

"Yes, but with a jovial partner and dice, and guineas clinking on the cloth, the night passes like a dream. You don't like playing, then?"

"On the contrary, I do."

"Lansquenet, for instance?"

"Devoted to it. I used to play almost every night in France."

"And since your return to England?"

"I have not handled a card or dice-box."

"I sincerely pity you," said D'Artagnan, with an air of profound compassion.

"Look here," said the Englishman.

"Well?"

"To-morrow I am on guard."

"In Stuart's room?"

"Yes; come and pass the night with me."

"Impossible!"

"Impossible! why so?"

"I play with Monsieur du Vallon every night. Sometimes we don't go to bed at all."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, he would be annoyed if I did not play with him!"

"Does he play well?"

"I have seen him lose as much as two thousand pistoles, laughing all the while till the tears rolled down."

"Bring him with you, then."

"But how about our prisoners?"

"Let your servants guard them."

"Yes, and give them a chance of escaping," said D'Artagnan. "Why, one of them is a rich lord from Touraine and the other a knight of Malta, of noble family. We have arranged the ransom of each of them — £2,000 on arriving in France. We are reluctant to leave for a single moment men whom our lackeys know to be millionaires. It is true we plundered them a little when we took them and I will even confess that it is their purse that Monsieur du Vallon and I draw on in our nightly play. Still, they may have concealed

some precious stone, some valuable diamond ; so that we are like those misers who are unable to absent themselves from their treasures. We have made ourselves the constant guardians of our men, and while I sleep Monsieur du Valon watches."

" Ah ! ah ! " said Groslow.

" You see, then, why I must decline your polite invitation, which is especially attractive to me, because nothing is so wearisome as to play night after night with the same person ; the chances always balance and at the month's end nothing is gained or lost."

" Ah ! " said Groslow, sighing ; " there is something still more wearisome, and that is not to play at all."

" I can understand that," said D'Artagnan.

" But come," resumed the Englishman, " are these men of yours dangerous ? "

" In what respect ? "

" Are they capable of attempting violence ? "

D'Artagnan burst out laughing at the idea.

" *Jésus Dieu !* " he cried ; " one of them is trembling with fever, having failed to adapt himself to this charming country of yours, and the other is a knight of Malta, as timid as a young girl ; and for greater security we have taken from them even their penknives and pocket scissors."

" Well, then," said Groslow, " bring them with you."

" But really — " said D'Artagnan.

" I have eight men on guard, you know. Four of them can guard the king and the other four your prisoners. I'll manage it somehow, you will see."

" But," said D'Artagnan, " now I think of it — what is to prevent our beginning to-night ? "

" Nothing at all," said Groslow.

" Just so. Come to us this evening and to-morrow we'll return your visit."

" Capital ! This evening with you, to-morrow at Stuart's, the next day with me."

" You see, that with a little forethought one can lead a merry life anywhere and everywhere," said D'Artagnan.

"Yes, with Frenchmen, and Frenchmen like you."

"And Monsieur du Vallon," added the other. "You will see what a fellow he is; a man who nearly killed Mazarin between two doors. They employ him because they are afraid of him. Ah, there he is calling me now. You'll excuse me, I know."

They exchanged bows and D'Artagnan returned to his companions.

"What on earth can you have been saying to that bulldog?" exclaimed Porthos.

"My dear fellow, don't speak like that of Monsieur Gros-low. He's one of my most intimate friends."

"One of your friends!" cried Porthos, "this butcher of unarmed farmers!"

"Hush! my dear Porthos. Monsieur Gros-low is perhaps rather hasty, it's true, but at bottom I have discovered two good qualities in him — he is conceited and stupid."

Porthos opened his eyes in amazement; Athos and Aramis looked at one another and smiled; they knew D'Artagnan and knew that he did nothing without a purpose.

"But," continued D'Artagnan, "you shall judge of him for yourself. He is coming to play with us this evening."

"Oho!" said Porthos, his eyes glistening at the news. "Is he rich?"

"He's the son of one of the wealthiest merchants in London."

"And knows lansquenet?"

"Adores it."

"Basset?"

"His mania."

"Biribi?"

"Revels in it."

"Good," said Porthos; "we shall pass an agreeable evening."

"The more so, as it will be the prelude to a better."

"How so?"

"We invite him to play to-night; he has invited us in

return to-morrow. But wait. To-night we stop at Derby ; and if there is a bottle of wine in the town let Musqueton buy it. It will be well to prepare a light supper, of which you, Athos and Aramis, are not to partake — Athos, because I told him you had a fever ; Aramis, because you are a knight of Malta and won't mix with fellows like us. Do you understand ? ”

“ That's no doubt very fine,” said Porthos ; “ but deuce take me if I understand at all.”

“ Porthos, my friend, you know I am descended on the father's side from the Prophets and on the mother's from the Sybils, and that I only speak in parables and riddles. Let those who have ears hear and those who have eyes see ; I can tell you nothing more at present.”

“ Go ahead, my friend,” said Athos ; “ I am sure that whatever you do is well done.”

“ And you, Aramis, are you of that opinion ? ”

“ Entirely so, my dear D'Artagnan.”

“ Very good,” said D'Artagnan ; “ here indeed are true believers ; it is a pleasure to work miracles before them ; they are not like that unbelieving Porthos, who must see and touch before he will believe.”

“ The fact is,” said Porthos, with an air of *finesse*, “ I am rather incredulous.”

D'Artagnan gave him a playful buffet on the shoulder, and as they had reached the station where they were to breakfast, the conversation ended there.

At five in the evening they sent Musqueton on before as agreed upon. Blaisois went with him.

In crossing the principal street in Derby the four friends perceived Blaisois standing in the doorway of a handsome house. It was there a lodging was prepared for them.

At the hour agreed upon Groslow came. D'Artagnan received him as he would have done a friend of twenty years' standing. Porthos scanned him from head to foot and smiled when he discovered that in spite of the blow he had administered to Parry's brother, he was not nearly so strong as

himself. Athos and Aramis suppressed as well as they could the disgust they felt in the presence of such coarseness and brutality.

In short, Groslow seemed to be pleased with his reception.

Athos and Aramis kept themselves to their *rôle*. At midnight they withdrew to their chamber, the door of which was left open on the pretext of kindly consideration. Furthermore, D'Artagnan went with them, leaving Porthos at play with Groslow.

Porthos gained fifty pistoles from Groslow and found him a more agreeable companion than he had at first believed him to be.

As to Groslow, he promised himself that on the following evening he would recover from D'Artagnan what he had lost to Porthos, and on leaving reminded the Gascon of his appointment.

The next day was spent as usual. D'Artagnan went from Captain Groslow to Colonel Harrison and from Colonel Harrison to his friends. To any one not acquainted with him he seemed to be in his normal condition; but to his friends—to Athos and Aramis—was apparent a certain feverishness in his gayety.

"What is he contriving?" asked Aramis.

"Wait," said Athos.

Porthos said nothing, but he handled in his pocket the fifty pistoles he had gained from Groslow with a degree of satisfaction which betrayed itself in his whole bearing.

Arrived at Ryston, D'Artagnan assembled his friends. His face had lost the expression of careless gayety it had worn like a mask the whole day. Athos pinched Aramis's hand.

"The moment is at hand," he said.

"Yes," returned D'Artagnan, who had overheard him, "to-night, gentlemen, we rescue the king."

"D'Artagnan," said Athos, "this is no joke, I trust? It would quite cut me up."

"You are a very odd man, Athos," he replied, "to doubt

me thus. Where and when have you seen me trifle with a friend's heart and a king's life? I have told you, and I repeat it, that to-night we rescue Charles I. You left it to me to discover the means and I have done so."

Porthos looked at D'Artagnan with an expression of profound admiration. Aramis smiled as one who hopes. Athos was pale and trembled in every limb.

"Speak," said Athos.

"We are invited," replied D'Artagnan, "to pass the night with M. Groslow. But do you know where?"

"No."

"In the king's room."

"The king's room?" cried Athos.

"Yes, gentlemen, in the king's room. Groslow is on guard there this evening, and to pass the time away he has invited us to keep him company."

"All four of us?" asked Athos.

"*Pardieu*! certainly, all four; we couldn't leave our prisoners, could we?"

"Ah! ah!" said Aramis.

"Tell us about it," said Athos, palpitating.

"We are going, then, we two with our swords, you with daggers. We four have got to master these eight fools and their stupid captain. Monsieur Porthos, what do you say to *that*?"

"I say it is easy enough," answered Porthos.

"We dress the king in Groslow's clothes. Musqueton, Grimaud and Blaisois have our horses saddled at the end of the first street. We mount them and before daylight are twenty leagues distant."

Athos placed his two hands on D'Artagnan's shoulders, and gazed at him with his calm, sad smile.

"I declare, my friend," said he, "that there is not a creature under the sky who equals you in prowess and in courage. Whilst we thought you indifferent to our sorrows, which you couldn't share without crime, you alone among us have discovered what we were searching for in vain. I

repeat it, D'Artagnan, you are the best one among us; I bless and love you, my dear son."

"And to think that I couldn't find that out," said Porthos, scratching his head; "it is so simple."

"But," said Aramis, "if I understand rightly we are to kill them all, eh?"

Athos shuddered and turned pale.

"*Mordieux!*" answered D'Artagnan; "I believe we must. I confess I can discover no other safe and satisfactory way."

"Let us see," said Aramis; "how are we to act?"

"I have arranged two plans. Firstly, at a given signal, which shall be the words 'At last,' you each plunge a dagger into the heart of the soldier nearest to you. We, on our side, do the same. That will be four killed. We shall then be matched, four against the remaining five. If these five men give themselves up we gag them; if they resist, we kill them. If by chance our Amphitryon changes his mind and receives only Porthos and myself, why, then, we must resort to heroic measures and each give two strokes instead of one. It will take a little longer time and may make a greater disturbance, but you will be outside with swords and will rush in at the proper time."

"But if you yourselves should be struck?" said Athos.

"Impossible!" said D'Artagnan; "those beer drinkers are too clumsy and awkward. Besides, you will strike at the throat, Porthos; it kills as quickly and prevents all outcry."

"Very good," said Porthos; "it will be a nice little throat cutting."

"Horrible horrible," exclaimed Athos.

"Nonsense," said D'Artagnan; "you would do as much, Mr. Humanity, in a battle. But if you think the king's life is not worth what it must cost there's an end of the matter and I send to Groslow to say I am ill."

"No, you are right," said Athos.

At this moment a soldier entered to inform them that Groslow was waiting for them.

"Where?" asked D'Artagnan.

"In the room of the English Nebuchadnezzar," replied the staunch Puritan.

"Good," replied Athos, whose blood mounted to his face at the insult offered to royalty; "tell the captain we are coming."

The Puritan then went out. The lackeys had been ordered to saddle eight horses and to wait, keeping together and without dismounting, at the corner of a street about twenty steps from the house where the king was lodged.

It was nine o'clock in the evening; the sentinels had been relieved at eight and Captain Groslow had been on guard for an hour. D'Artagnan and Porthos, armed with their swords, and Athos and Aramis, each carrying a concealed poniard, approached the house which for the time being was Charles Stuart's prison. The two latter followed their captors in the humble guise of captives, without arms.

"Od's bodikins," said Groslow, as the four friends entered, "I had almost given you up."

D'Artagnan went up to him and whispered in his ear:

"The fact is, we, that is, Monsieur du Vallon and I, hesitated a little."

"And why?"

D'Artagnan looked significantly toward Athos and Aramis.

"Aha," said Groslow; "on account of political opinions? No matter. On the contrary," he added, laughing, "if they want to see their Stuart they shall see him."

"Are we to pass the night in the king's room?" asked D'Artagnan.

"No, but in the one next to it, and as the door will remain open it comes to the same thing. Have you provided yourself with money? I assure you I intend to play the devil's game to-night."

D'Artagnan rattled the gold in his pockets.

"Very good," said Groslow, and opened the door of the room. "I will show you the way," and he went in first.

D'Artagnan turned to look at his friends. Porthos was perfectly indifferent; Athos, pale, but resolute; Aramis was wiping a slight moisture from his brow.

The eight guards were at their posts. Four in the king's room, two at the door between the rooms and two at that by which the friends had entered. Athos smiled when he saw their bare swords; he felt it was no longer to be a butchery, but a fight, and he resumed his usual good humor.

Charles was perceived through the door, lying dressed upon his bed, at the head of which Parry was seated, reading in a low voice a chapter from the Bible.

A candle of coarse tallow on a black table lighted up the handsome and resigned face of the king and that of his faithful retainer, far less calm.

From time to time Parry stopped, thinking the king, whose eyes were closed, was really asleep, but Charles would open his eyes and say with a smile :

"Go on, my good Parry, I am listening."

Groslow advanced to the door of the king's room, replaced on his head the hat he had taken off to receive his guests, looked for a moment contemptuously at this simple, yet touching scene, then turning to D'Artagnan, assumed an air of triumph at what he had achieved.

"Capital !" cried the Gascon, "you would make a distinguished general."

"And do you think," asked Groslow, "that Stuart will ever escape while I am on guard ?"

"No, to be sure," replied D'Artagnan ; "unless, forsooth, the sky rains friends upon him."

Groslow's face brightened.

It is impossible to say whether Charles, who kept his eyes constantly closed, had noticed the insolence of the Puritan captain, but the moment he heard the clear tone of D'Artagnan's voice his eyelids rose, in spite of himself.

Parry, too, started and stopped reading.

"What are you thinking about ?" said the king ; "go on, my good Parry, unless you are tired."

Parry resumed his reading.

On a table in the next room were lighted candles, cards, two dice-boxes, and dice.

"Gentlemen," said Groslow, "I beg you will take your places. I will sit facing Stuart, whom I like so much to see, especially where he now is, and you, Monsieur d'Artagnan, opposite to me."

Athos turned red with rage. D'Artagnan frowned at him.

"That's it," said D'Artagnan; "you, Monsieur le Comte de la Fère, to the right of Monsieur Groslow. You, Chevalier d'Herblay, to his left. Du Vallon next me. You'll bet for me and those gentlemen for Monsieur Groslow."

By this arrangement D'Artagnan could nudge Porthos with his knee and make signs with his eyes to Athos and Aramis.

At the names Comte de la Fère and Chevalier d'Herblay, Charles opened his eyes and raising his noble head, in spite of himself, threw a glance at all the actors in the scene.

At that moment Parry turned over several leaves of his Bible and read with a loud voice this verse in Jeremiah :

"God said, 'Hear ye the words of the prophets my servants, whom I have sent unto you.'"

The four friends exchanged glances. The words that Parry had read assured them that their presence was understood by the king and was assigned to its real motive. D'Artagnan's eyes sparkled with joy.

"You asked me just now if I was in funds," said D'Artagnan, placing some twenty pistoles upon the table. "Well, in my turn I advise you to keep a sharp lookout on your TREASURE, my dear Monsieur Groslow, for I can tell you we shall not leave this without robbing you of it."

"Not without my defending it," said Groslow.

"So much the better," said D'Artagnan. "Fight, my dear captain, fight. You know or you don't know, that that is what we ask of you."

"Oh! yes," said Groslow, bursting with his usual coarse laugh, "I know you Frenchmen want nothing but cuts and bruises."

Charles had heard and understood it all. A slight color mounted to his cheeks. The soldiers then saw him stretch

his limbs, little by little, and under the pretense of much heat throw off the Scotch plaid which covered him.

Athos and Aramis started with delight to find that the king was lying with his clothes on.

The game began. The luck had turned, and Groslow, having won some hundred pistoles, was in the merriest possible humor.

Porthos, who had lost the fifty pistoles he had won the night before and thirty more besides, was very cross and questioned D'Artagnan with a nudge of the knee as to whether it would not soon be time to change the game. Athos and Aramis looked at him inquiringly. But D'Artagnan remained impassible.

It struck ten. They heard the guard going its rounds.

"How many rounds do they make a night?" asked D'Artagnan, drawing more pistoles from his pocket.

"Five," answered Groslow, "one every two hours."

D'Artagnan glanced at Athos and Aramis and for the first time replied to Porthos's nudge of the knee by a nudge responsive. Meanwhile, the soldiers, whose duty it was to remain in the king's room, attracted by that love of play so powerful in all men, had stolen little by little toward the table, and standing on tiptoe, lounged, watching the game, over the shoulders of D'Artagnan and Porthos. Those on the other side had followed their example, thus favoring the views of the four friends, who preferred having them close at hand to chasing them about the chamber. The two sentinels at the door still had their swords unsheathed, but they were leaning on them while they watched the game.

Athos seemed to grow calm as the critical moment approached. With his white, aristocratic hands he played with the louis, bending and straightening them again, as if they were made of pewter. Aramis, less self-controlled, fumbled continually with his hidden poniard. Porthos, impatient at his continued losses, kept up a vigorous play with his knee.

D'Artagnan turned, mechanically looking behind him, and

between the figures of two soldiers he could see Parry standing up and Charles leaning on his elbow with his hands clasped and apparently offering a fervent prayer to God.

D'Artagnan saw that the moment was come. He darted a preparatory glance at Athos and Aramis, who slyly pushed their chairs a little back so as to leave themselves more space for action. He gave Porthos a second nudge of the knee and Porthos got up as if to stretch his legs and took care at the same time to ascertain that his sword could be drawn smoothly from the scabbard.

"Hang it!" cried D'Artagnan, "another twenty pistoles lost. Really, Captain Groslow, you are too much in fortune's way. This can't last," and he drew another twenty from his pocket. "One more turn, captain; twenty pistoles on one throw — only one, the last."

"Done for twenty," replied Groslow.

And he turned up two cards as usual, a king for D'Artagnan and an ace for himself.

"A king," said D'Artagnan; "it's a good omen, Master Groslow — look out for the king."

And in spite of his extraordinary self-control there was a strange vibration in the Gascon's voice which made his partner start.

Groslow began turning the cards one after another. If he turned up an ace first he won; if a king he lost.

He turned up a king.

"At last!" cried D'Artagnan.

At this word Athos and Aramis jumped up. Porthos drew back a step. Daggers and swords were just about to shine, when suddenly the door was thrown open and Harrison appeared in the doorway, accompanied by a man enveloped in a large cloak. Behind this man could be seen the glistening muskets of half a dozen soldiers.

Groslow jumped up, ashamed at being surprised in the midst of wine, cards and dice. But Harrison paid not the least attention to him, and entering the king's room, followed by his companion :

"Charles Stuart," said he, "an order has come to conduct you to London without stopping day or night. Prepare yourself, then, to start at once."

"And by whom is this order given?" asked the king.

"By General Oliver Cromwell. And here is Mr. Mordaunt, who has brought it and is charged with its execution."

"Mordaunt!" muttered the four friends, exchanging glances.

D'Artagnan swept up the money that he and Porthos had lost and buried it in his huge pocket. Athos and Aramis placed themselves behind him. At this movement Mordaunt turned around, recognized them, and uttered an exclamation of savage delight.

"I'm afraid we are prisoners," whispered D'Artagnan to his friend.

"Not yet," replied Porthos.

"Colonel, colonel," cried Mordaunt, "you are betrayed. These four Frenchmen have escaped from Newcastle, and no doubt want to carry off the king. Arrest them."

"Ah! my young man," said D'Artagnan, drawing his sword, "that is an order sooner given than executed. Fly, friends, fly!" he added, whirling his sword around him.

The next moment he darted to the door and knocked down two of the soldiers who guarded it, before they had time to cock their muskets. Athos and Aramis followed him. Porthos brought up the rear, and before soldiers, officers, or colonel had time to recover their surprise all four were in the street.

"Fire!" cried Mordaunt; "fire upon them!"

Three or four shots were fired, but with no other result than to show the four fugitives turning the corner of the street safe and sound.

The horses were at the place fixed upon and they leaped lightly into their saddles.

"Forward!" cried D'Artagnan, "and spur for your dear lives!"

They galloped away and took the road they had come by

in the morning, namely, in the direction toward Scotland. A few hundred yards beyond the town D'Artagnan drew rein.

"Halt!" he cried; "this time we shall be pursued. We must let them leave the village and ride after us on the northern road and when they have passed we will take the opposite direction."

There was a stream close by and a bridge across it. D'Artagnan led his horse under the arch of the bridge. The others followed. Ten minutes later they heard the rapid gallop of a troop of horsemen. A few minutes more and the troop passed over their heads.

CHAPTER LXII.

LONDON.

As soon as the noise of the hoofs was lost in the distance D'Artagnan remounted the bank of the stream and scoured the plain, followed by his three friends, directing their course, as well as they could guess, toward London.

"This time," said D'Artagnan, when they were sufficiently distant to proceed at a trot, "I think all is lost and we have nothing better to do than to reach France. What do you say, Athos, to that proposition? Isn't it reasonable?"

"Yes, dear friend," Athos replied, "but you said a word the other day that was more than reasonable — it was noble and generous. You said, 'Let us die here!' I recall to you that word."

"Oh," said Porthos, "death is nothing: it isn't death that can disquiet us, since we don't know what it is. What troubles me is the idea of defeat. As things are turning out, I foresee that we must give battle to London, to the provinces, to all England, and certainly in the end we can't fail to be beaten."

"We ought to witness this great tragedy even to its last scene," said Athos. "Whatever happens, let us not leave England before the crisis. Don't you agree with me, Aramis?"

"Entirely, my dear count. Then, too, I confess I should not be sorry to come across Mordaunt again. It appears to me that we have an account to settle with him, and that it is not our custom to leave a place without paying our debts, of *this* kind, at least."

"Ah! that's another thing," said D'Artagnan, "and I

should not mind waiting in London a whole year for a chance of meeting this Mordaunt in question. Only let us lodge with some one on whom we can count; for I imagine, just now, that Noll Cromwell would not be inclined to trifle with us. Athos, do you know any inn in the whole town where one can find white sheets, roast beef reasonably cooked, and wine which is not made of hops and gin?"

"I think I know what you want," replied Athos. "De Winter took us to the house of a Spaniard, who, he said, had become naturalized as an Englishman by the guineas of his new compatriots. What do you say to it, Aramis?"

"Why, the idea of taking quarters with Señor Perez seems to me very reasonable and for my part I agree to it. We will invoke the remembrance of that poor De Winter, for whom he seemed to have a great regard; we will tell him that we have come as amateurs to see what is going on; we will spend with him a guinea each per day; and I think that by taking all these precautions we can be quite undisturbed."

"You forget, Aramis, one precaution of considerable importance."

"What is that?"

"The precaution of changing our clothes."

"Changing our clothes!" exclaimed Porthos. "I don't see why; we are very comfortable in those we wear."

"To prevent recognition," said D'Artagnan. "Our clothes have a cut which would proclaim the Frenchman at first sight. Now I don't set sufficient store on the cut of my jerkin to risk being hung at Tyburn or sent for change of scene to the Indies. I shall buy a chestnut-colored suit. I've remarked that your Puritans revel in that color."

"But can you find your man?" said Aramis to Athos.

"Oh! to be sure, yes. He lives at the Bedford Tavern, Greenhall Street. Besides, I can find my way about the city with my eyes shut."

"I wish we were already there," said D'Artagnan; "and my advice is that we reach London before daybreak, even if we kill our horses."

"Come on, then," said Athos; "for unless I am mistaken in my calculations we have only eight or ten leagues to go."

The friends urged on their horses and arrived, in fact, at about five o'clock in the morning. They were stopped and questioned at the gate by which they sought to enter the city, but Athos replied, in excellent English, that they had been sent forward by Colonel Harrison to announce to his colleague, Monsieur Bridge, the approach of the king. That reply led to several questions about the king's capture, and Athos gave details so precise and positive that if the gatekeepers had any suspicions they vanished completely. The way was therefore opened to the four friends with all sorts of Puritan congratulations.

Athos was right. He went direct to the Bedford Tavern, and the host, who recognized him, was delighted to see him again with such a numerous and promising company.

Though it was scarcely daylight our four travelers found the town in a great bustle, owing to the reported approach of Harrison and the king.

The plan of changing their clothes was unanimously adopted. The landlord sent out for every description of garment, as if he wanted to fit up his wardrobe. Athos chose a black coat, which gave him the appearance of a respectable citizen. Aramis, not wishing to part with his sword, selected a dark-blue cloak of a military cut. Porthos was seduced by a wine-colored doublet and sea-green breeches. D'Artagnan, who had fixed on his color beforehand, had only to select the shade, and looked in his chestnut suit exactly like a retired sugar dealer.

"Now," said D'Artagnan, "for the actual man. We must cut off our hair, that the populace may not insult us. As we no longer wear the sword of the gentleman we may as well have the head of the Puritan. This, as you know, is the important point of distinction between the Covenanters and the Cavalier."

After some discussion this was agreed to and Musqueton played the *rôle* of barber.

"We look hideous," said Athos.

"And smack of the Puritan to a frightful extent," said Aramis.

"My head feels actually cold," said Porthos.

"As for me, I feel anxious to preach a sermon," said D'Artagnan.

"Now," said Athos, "that we cannot even recognize one another and have therefore no fear of others recognizing us, let us go and see the king's entrance."

They had not been long in the crowd before loud cries announced the king's arrival. A carriage had been sent to meet him, and the gigantic Porthos, who stood a head above the entire rabble, soon announced that he saw the royal equipage approaching. D'Artagnan raised himself on tiptoe and as the carriage passed, saw Harrison at one window and Mordaunt at the other.

The next day, Athos, leaning out of his window, which looked upon the most populous part of the city, heard the Act of Parliament, which summoned the ex-king, Charles I., to the bar, publicly cried.

"Parliament indeed!" cried Athos. "Parliament can never have passed such an act as that."

At this moment the landlord came in.

"Did parliament pass this act?" Athos asked of him in English.

"Yes, my lord, the pure parliament."

"What do you mean by 'the pure parliament?' Are there, then, two parliaments?"

"My friend," D'Artagnan interrupted, "as I don't understand English and we all understand Spanish, have the kindness to speak to us in that language, which, since it is your own, you must find pleasure in using when you have the chance."

"Ah! excellent!" said Aramis.

As to Porthos, all his attention was concentrated on the allurements of the breakfast table.

"You were asking, then?" said the host in Spanish.

"I asked," said Athos, in the same language, "if there are two parliaments, a pure and an impure?"

"Why, how extraordinary!" said Porthos, slowly raising his head and looking at his friends with an air of astonishment, "I understand English, then! I understand what you say!"

"That is because we are talking Spanish, my dear friend," said Athos.

"Oh, the devil!" said Porthos, "I am sorry for that; it would have been one language more."

"When I speak of the pure parliament," resumed the host, "I mean the one which Colonel Bridge has weeded."

"Ah! really," said D'Artagnan, "these people are very ingenious. When I go back to France I must suggest some such convenient course to Cardinal Mazarin and the coadjutor. One of them will weed the parliament in the name of the court, and the other in the name of the people; and then there won't be any parliament at all."

"And who is this Colonel Bridge?" asked Aramis, "and how does he go to work to weed the parliament?"

"Colonel Bridge," replied the Spaniard, "is a retired wagoner, a man of much sense, who made one valuable observation whilst driving his team, namely, that where there happened to be a stone on the road, it was much easier to remove the stone than try and make the wheel pass over it. Now, of two hundred and fifty-one members who composed the parliament, there were one hundred and ninety-one who were in the way and might have upset his political wagon. He took them up, just as he formerly used to take up the stones from the road, and threw them out of the house."

"Neat," remarked D'Artagnan. "Very!"

"And all these one hundred and ninety-one were Royalists?" asked Athos.

"Without doubt, señor; and you understand that they would have saved the king."

"To be sure," said Porthos, with majestic common sense; "they were in the majority."

"And you think," said Aramis, "he will consent to appear before such a tribunal?"

"He will be forced to do so," smiled the Spaniard.

"Now, Athos!" said D'Artagnan, "do you begin to believe that it's a ruined cause, and that what with your Harrisons, Joyces, Bridges and Cromwells, we shall never get the upper hand?"

"The king will be delivered at the tribunal," said Athos; "the very silence of his supporters indicates that they are at work."

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders.

"But," said Aramis, "if they dare to condemn their king, it can only be to exile or imprisonment."

D'Artagnan whistled a little air of incredulity.

"We shall see," said Athos, "for we shall go to the sittings, I presume."

"You will not have long to wait," said the landlord; "they begin to-morrow."

"So, then, they drew up the indictments before the king was taken?"

"Of course," said D'Artagnan; "they began the day he was sold."

"And you know," said Aramis, "that it was our friend Mordaunt who made, if not the bargain, at least the overtures."

"And you know," added D'Artagnan, "that whenever I catch him I will kill him, this Mordaunt."

"And I, too," exclaimed Porthos.

"And I, too," added Aramis.

"Touching unanimity!" cried D'Artagnan, "which well becomes good citizens like us. Let us take a turn around the town and imbibe a little fog."

"Yes," said Porthos, "'twill be at least a little change from beer."

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE TRIAL.

THE next morning King Charles I. was haled by a strong guard before the high court which was to judge him. All London was crowding to the doors of the house. The throng was terrific, and it was not till after much pushing and some fighting that our friends reached their destination. When they did so they found the three lower rows of benches already occupied; but being anxious not to be too conspicuous, all, with the exception of Porthos, who had a fancy to display his red doublet, were quite satisfied with their places, the more so as chance had brought them to the centre of their row, so that they were exactly opposite the arm-chair prepared for the royal prisoner.

Toward eleven o'clock the king entered the hall, surrounded by guards, but wearing his head covered, and with a calm expression turned to every side with a look of complete assurance, as if he were there to preside at an assembly of submissive subjects, rather than to meet the accusations of a rebel court.

The judges, proud of having a monarch to humiliate, evidently prepared to enjoy the right they had arrogated to themselves and sent an officer to inform the king that it was customary for the accused to uncover his head.

Charles, without replying a single word, turned his head in another direction and pulled his felt hat over it. Then when the officer was gone he sat down in the arm-chair opposite the president and struck his boots with a little cane which he carried in his hand. Parry, who accompanied him, stood behind him.

D'Artagnan was looking at Athos, whose face betrayed all those emotions which the king, possessing more self-control, had banished from his own. This agitation in one so cool and calm as Athos, frightened him.

"I hope," he whispered to him, "that you will follow his majesty's example and not get killed for your folly in this den."

"Set your mind at rest," replied Athos.

"Aha!" continued D'Artagnan, "it is clear that they are afraid of something or other; for look, the sentinels are being reinforced. They had only halberds before, now they have muskets. The halberds were for the audience in the rear; the muskets are for us."

"Thirty, forty, fifty, sixty-five men," said Porthos, counting the reinforcements.

"Ah!" said Aramis, "but you forget the officer."

D'Artagnan grew pale with rage. He recognized Morдаunt, who with bare sword was marshaling the musketeers behind the king and opposite the benches.

"Do you think they have recognized us?" said D'Artagnan. "In that case I should beat a retreat. I don't care to be shot in a box."

"No," said Aramis, "he has not seen us. He sees no one but the king. *Mon Dieu!* how he stares at him, the insolent dog! Does he hate his majesty as much as he does us?"

"*Pardi,*" answered Athos, "we only carried off his mother; the king has spoiled him of his name and property."

"True," said Aramis; "but silence! the president is speaking to the king."

"Stuart," Bradshaw was saying, "listen to the roll call of your judges and address to the court any observations you may have to make."

The king turned his head away, as if these words had not been intended for him. Bradshaw waited, and as there was no reply there was a moment of silence.

Out of the hundred and sixty-three members designated

there were only seventy-three present, for the rest, fearful of taking part in such an act, had remained away.

When the name of Colonel Fairfax was called, one of those brief but solemn silences ensued, which announced the absence of the members who had no wish to take a personal part in the trial.

"Colonel Fairfax," repeated Bradshaw.

"Fairfax," answered a laughing voice, the silvery tone of which betrayed it as that of a woman, "is not such a fool as to be here."

A loud laugh followed these words, pronounced with that boldness which women draw from their own weakness — a weakness which removes them beyond the power of vengeance.

"It is a woman's voice," cried Aramis; "faith, I would give a good deal if she is young and pretty." And he mounted on the bench to try and get a sight of her.

"By my soul," said Aramis, "she is charming. Look, D'Artagnan; everybody is looking at her; and in spite of Bradshaw's gaze she has not turned pale."

"It is Lady Fairfax herself," said D'Artagnan. "Don't you remember, Porthos, we saw her at General Cromwell's?"

The roll call continued.

"These rascals will adjourn when they find that they are not in sufficient force," said the Comte de la Fère.

"You don't know them. Athos, look at Mordaunt's smile. Is that the look of a man whose victim is likely to escape him? Ah, cursed basilisk, it will be a happy day for me when I can cross something more than a look with you."

"The king is really very handsome," said Porthos; "and look, too, though he is a prisoner, how carefully he is dressed. The feather in his hat is worth at least five-and-twenty pistoles. Look at it, Aramis."

The roll call finished, the president ordered them to read the act of accusation. Athos turned pale. A second time he was disappointed in his expectation. Notwithstanding the judges were so few the trial was to continue; the king, then, was condemned in advance.

"I told you so, Athos," said D'Artagnan, shrugging his shoulders. "Now take your courage in both hands and hear what this gentleman in black is going to say about his sovereign, with full license and privilege."

Never till then had a more brutal accusation or meaner insults tarnished kingly majesty.

Charles listened with marked attention, passing over the insults, noting the grievances, and, when hatred overflowed all bounds and the accuser turned executioner beforehand, replying with a smile of lofty scorn.

"The fact is," said D'Artagnan, "if men are punished for imprudence and triviality, this poor king deserves punishment. But it seems to me that that which he is just now undergoing is hard enough."

"In any case," Aramis replied, "the punishment should fall not on the king, but on his ministers; for the first article of the constitution is, 'The king can do no wrong.'"

"As for me," thought Porthos, giving Mordaunt his whole attention, "were it not for breaking in on the majesty of the situation I would leap down from the bench, reach Mordaunt in three bounds and strangle him; I would then take him by the feet and knock the life out of these wretched musketeers who parody the musketeers of France. Meantime, D'Artagnan, who is full of invention, would find some way to save the king. I must speak to him about it."

As to Athos, his face aflame, his fists clinched, his lips bitten till they bled, he sat there foaming with rage at that endless parliamentary insult and that long enduring royal patience; the inflexible arm and steadfast heart had given place to a trembling hand and a body shaken by excitement.

At this moment the accuser concluded with these words: "The present accusation is preferred by us in the name of the English people."

At these words there was a murmur along the benches, and a second voice, not that of a woman, but a man's, stout and furious, thundered behind D'Artagnan.

"You lie!" it cried. "Nine-tenths of the English people are horrified at what you say."

This voice was that of Athos, who, standing up with outstretched hand and quite out of his mind, thus assailed the public accuser.

King, judges, spectators, all turned their eyes to the bench where the four friends were seated. Mordaunt did the same and recognized the gentleman, around whom the three other Frenchmen were standing, pale and menacing. His eyes glittered with delight. He had discovered those to whose death he had devoted his life. A movement of fury called to his side some twenty of his musketeers, and pointing to the bench where his enemies were: "Fire on that bench!" he cried.

But with the rapidity of thought D'Artagnan seized Athos by the waist, and followed by Porthos with Aramis, leaped down from the benches, rushed into the passages, and flying down the staircase were lost in the crowd without, while the muskets within were pointed on some three thousand spectators, whose piteous cries and noisy alarm stopped the impulse already given to bloodshed.

Charles also had recognized the four Frenchmen. He put one hand on his heart to still its beating and the other over his eyes, that he might not witness the slaying of his faithful friends.

Mordaunt, pale and trembling with anger, rushed from the hall, sword in hand, followed by six pikemen, pushing, inquiring and panting in the crowd; and then, having found nothing, returned.

The tumult was indescribable. More than half an hour passed before any one could make himself heard. The judges were looking for a new outbreak from the benches. The spectators saw the muskets leveled at them, and divided between fear and curiosity, remained noisy and excited.

Quiet was at length restored.

"What have you to say in your defense?" asked Bradshaw of the king.

Then rising, with his head still covered, in the tone of a judge rather than a prisoner, Charles began.

"Before questioning me," he said, "reply to my question. I was free at Newcastle and had there concluded a treaty with both houses. Instead of performing your part of this contract, as I performed mine, you bought me from the Scotch, cheaply, I know, and that does honor to the economic talent of your government. But because you have paid the price of a slave, do you imagine that I have ceased to be your king? No. To answer you would be to forget it. I shall only reply to you when you have satisfied me of your right to question me. To answer you would be to acknowledge you as my judges and I only acknowledge you as my executioners." And in the middle of a deathlike silence, Charles, calm, lofty, and with his head still covered, sat down again in his arm-chair.

"Why are not my Frenchmen here?" he murmured proudly and turning his eyes to the benches where they had appeared for a moment; "they would have seen that their friend was worthy of their defense while alive, and of their tears when dead."

"Well," said the president, seeing that Charles was determined to remain silent, "so be it. We will judge you in spite of your silence. You are accused of treason, of abuse of power, and murder. The evidence will support it. Go, and another sitting will accomplish what you have postponed in this."

Charles rose and turned toward Parry, whom he saw pale and with his temples dewed with moisture.

"Well, my dear Parry," said he, "what is the matter, and what can affect you in this manner?"

"Oh, my king," said Parry, with tears in his eyes and in a tone of supplication, "do not look to the left as we leave the hall."

"And why, Parry?"

"Do not look, I implore you, my king."

"But what is the matter? Speak," said Charles, attempting to look across the hedge of guards which surrounded him.

"It is — but you will not look, will you? — it is because they have had the axe, with which criminals are executed, brought and placed there on the table. The sight is hideous."

"Fools," said Charles, "do they take me for a coward, like themselves? You have done well to warn me. Thank you, Parry."

When the moment arrived the king followed his guards out of the hall. As he passed the table on which the axe was laid, he stopped, and turning with a smile, said :

"Ah ! the axe, an ingenious device, and well worthy of those who know not what a gentleman is ; you frighten me not, executioner's axe," added he, touching it with the cane which he held in his hand, "and I strike you now, waiting patiently and Christianly for you to return the blow."

And shrugging his shoulders with unaffected contempt he passed on. When he reached the door a stream of people, who had been disappointed in not being able to get into the house and to make amends had collected to see him come out, stood on each side, as he passed, many among them glaring on him with threatening looks.

"How many people," thought he, "and not one true friend."

And as he uttered these words of doubt and depression within his mind, a voice beside him said :

"Respect to fallen majesty."

The king turned quickly around, with tears in his eyes and heart. It was an old soldier of the guards, who could not see his king pass captive before him without rendering him this final homage. But the next moment the unfortunate man was nearly killed with heavy blows of sword-hilts, and among those who set upon him the king recognized Captain Groslow.

"Alas !" said Charles, "that is a severe chastisement for a very trifling fault."

He continued his walk, but he had scarcely gone a hundred paces, when a furious fellow, leaning between two

soldiers, spat in the king's face, as once an infamous and accursed Jew spit in the face of Jesus of Nazareth. Loud roars of laughter and sullen murmurs arose together. The crowd opened and closed again, undulating like a stormy sea, and the king imagined that he saw shining in the midst of this living wave the bright eyes of Athos.

Charles wiped his face and said with a sad smile: "Poor wretch, for half a crown he would do as much to his own father."

The king was not mistaken. Athos and his friends, again mingling with the throng, were taking a last look at the martyr king.

When the soldier saluted Charles, Athos's heart bounded for joy; and that unfortunate, on coming to himself, found ten guineas that the French gentleman had slipped into his pocket. But when the cowardly insulter spat in the face of the captive monarch Athos grasped his dagger. But D'Artagnan stopped his hand and in a hoarse voice cried, "Wait!"

Athos stopped. D'Artagnan, leaning on Athos, made a sign to Porthos and Aramis to keep near them and then placed himself behind the man with the bare arms, who was still laughing at his own vile pleasantry and receiving the congratulations of several others.

The man took his way toward the city. The four friends followed him. The man, who had the appearance of being a butcher, descended a little steep and isolated street, looking on to the river, with two of his friends. Arrived at the bank of the river the three men perceived that they were followed, turned around, and looking insolently at the Frenchmen, passed some jests from one to another.

"I don't know English, Athos," said D'Artagnan; "but you know it and will interpret for me."

Then quickening their steps they passed the three men, but turned back immediately and D'Artagnan walked straight up to the butcher and touching him on the chest with the tip of his finger, said to Athos:

"Say this to him in English: 'You are a coward. You have insulted a defenseless man. You have befouled the face of your king. You must die.'"

Athos, pale as a ghost, repeated these words to the man, who, seeing the bodeful preparations that were making, put himself in an attitude of defense. Aramis, at this movement, drew his sword.

"No," cried D'Artagnan, "no steel. Steel is for gentlemen."

And seizing the butcher by the throat:

"Porthos," said he, "kill this fellow for me with a single blow."

Porthos raised his terrible fist, which whistled through the air like a sling, and the portentous mass fell with a smothered crash on the insulter's skull and crushed it. The man fell like an ox beneath the poleaxe. His companions, horror-struck, could neither move nor cry out.

"Tell them this, Athos," resumed D'Artagnan; "thus shall all die who forget that a captive man is sacred and that a captive king doubly represents the Lord."

Athos repeated D'Artagnan's words.

The fellows looked at the body of their companion, swimming in blood, and then recovering voice and legs together, ran screaming off.

"Justice is done," said Porthos, wiping his forehead.

"And now," said D'Artagnan to Athos, "entertain no further doubts about me; I undertake all that concerns the king."

CHAPTER LXIV.

WHITEHALL.

THE parliament condemned Charles to death, as might have been foreseen. Political judgments are generally vain formalities, for the same passions which give rise to the accusation ordain to the condemnation. Such is the atrocious logic of revolutions.

Although our friends were expecting that condemnation, it filled them with grief. D'Artagnan, whose mind was never more fertile in resources than in critical emergencies, swore again that he would try all conceivable means to prevent the *dénouement* of the bloody tragedy. But by what means? As yet he could form no definite plan; all must depend on circumstances. Meanwhile, it was necessary at all hazards, in order to gain time, to put some obstacle in the way of the execution on the following day — the day appointed by the judges. The only way of doing that was to cause the disappearance of the London executioner. The headsman out of the way, the sentence could not be executed. True, they could send for the headsman of the nearest town, but at least a day would be gained and a day might be sufficient for the rescue. D'Artagnan took upon himself that more than difficult task.

Another thing, not less essential, was to warn Charles Stuart of the attempt to be made, so that he might assist his rescuers as much as possible, or at least do nothing to thwart their efforts. Aramis assumed that perilous charge. Charles Stuart had asked that Bishop Juxon might be permitted to visit him. Mordaunt had called on the bishop that very evening to apprise him of the religious desire expressed by

the king and also of Cromwell's permission. Aramis determined to obtain from the bishop, through fear or by persuasion, consent that he should enter in the bishop's place, and clad in his sacerdotal robes, the prison at Whitehall.

Finally, Athos undertook to provide, in any event, the means of leaving England — in case either of failure or of success.

The night having come they made an appointment to meet at eleven o'clock at the hotel, and each started out to fulfill his dangerous mission.

The palace of Whitehall was guarded by three regiments of cavalry and by the fierce anxiety of Cromwell, who came and went or sent his generals or his agents continually. Alone in his usual room, lighted by two candles, the condemned monarch gazed sadly on the luxury of his past greatness, just as at the last hour one sees the images of life more mildly brilliant than of yore.

Parry had not quitted his master and since his condemnation had not ceased to weep. Charles, leaning on a table, was gazing at a medallion of his wife and daughter; he was waiting first for Juxon, then for martyrdom.

At times he thought of those brave French gentlemen who had appeared to him from a distance of a hundred leagues fabulous and unreal, like the forms that appear in dreams. In fact, he sometimes asked himself if all that was happening to him was not a dream, or at least the delirium of a fever. He rose and took a few steps as if to rouse himself from his torpor and went as far as the window; he saw glittering below him the muskets of the guards. He was thereupon constrained to admit that he was indeed awake and that his bloody dream was real.

Charles returned in silence to his chair, rested his elbow on the table, bowed his head upon his hand and reflected.

"Alas!" he said to himself, "if I only had for a confessor one of those lights of the church, whose soul has sounded all the mysteries of life, all the littlenesses of greatness, perhaps his utterance would overawe the voice that wails within my

soul. But I shall have a priest of vulgar mind, whose career and fortune I have ruined by my misfortune. He will speak to me of God and death, as he has spoken to many another dying man, not understanding that this one leaves his throne to an usurper, his children to the cold contempt of public charity."

And he raised the medallion to his lips.

It was a dull, foggy night. A neighboring church clock slowly struck the hour. The flickering light of the two candles showed fitful phantom shadows in the lofty room. These were the ancestors of Charles, standing back dimly in their tarnished frames.

An awful sadness enveloped the heart of Charles. He buried his brow in his hands and thought of the world, so beautiful when one is about to leave it; of the caresses of children, so pleasing and so sweet, especially when one is parting from his children never to see them again; then of his wife, the noble and courageous woman who had sustained him to the last moment. He drew from his breast the diamond cross and the star of the Garter which she had sent him by those generous Frenchmen; he kissed it, and then, as he reflected that she would never again see those things till he lay cold and mutilated in the tomb, there passed over him one of those icy shivers which may be called forerunners of death.

Then, in that chamber which recalled to him so many royal souvenirs, whither had come so many courtiers, the scene of so much flattering homage, alone with a despairing servant, whose feeble soul could afford no support to his own, the king at last yielded to sorrow and his courage sank to a level with that feebleness, those shadows, and that wintry cold. That king, who was so grand, so sublime in the hour of death, meeting his fate with a smile of resignation on his lips, now in that gloomy hour wiped away a tear which had fallen on the table and quivered on the gold embroidered cloth.

Suddenly the door opened, an ecclesiastic in episcopal robes

entered, followed by two guards, to whom the king waved an imperious gesture. The guards retired; the room resumed its obscurity.

"Juxon!" cried Charles, "Juxon, thank you, my last friend; you come at a fitting moment."

The bishop looked anxiously at the man sobbing in the ingle-nook.

"Come, Parry," said the king, "cease your tears."

"If it's Parry," said the bishop, "I have nothing to fear; so allow me to salute your majesty and to tell you who I am and for what I am come."

At this sight and this voice Charles was about to cry out, when Aramis placed his finger on his lips and bowed low to the king of England.

"The chevalier!" murmured Charles.

"Yes, sire," interrupted Aramis, raising his voice, "Bishop Juxon, the faithful knight of Christ, obedient to your majesty's wishes."

Charles clasped his hands, amazed and stupefied to find that these foreigners, without other motive than that which their conscience imposed on them, thus combated the will of a people and the destiny of a king.

"You!" he said, "you! how did you penetrate hither? If they recognize you, you are lost."

"Care not for me, sire; think only of yourself. You see, your friends are wakeful. I know not what we shall do yet, but four determined men can do much. Meanwhile, do not be surprised at anything that happens; prepare yourself for every emergency."

Charles shook his head.

"Do you know that I die to-morrow at ten o'clock?"

"Something, your majesty, will happen between now and then to make the execution impossible."

The king looked at Aramis with astonishment.

At this moment a strange noise, like the unloading of a cart, and followed by a cry of pain, was heard beneath the window.

"Do you hear?" said the king.

"I hear," said Aramis, "but I understand neither the noise nor the cry of pain."

"I know not who can have uttered the cry," said the king, "but the noise is easily understood. Do you know that I am to be beheaded outside this window? Well, these boards you hear unloaded are the posts and planks to build my scaffold. Some workman must have fallen underneath them and been hurt."

Aramis shuddered in spite of himself.

"You see," said the king, "that it is useless for you to resist. I am condemned; leave me to my death."

"My king," said Aramis, "they well may raise a scaffold, but they cannot make an executioner."

"What do you mean?" asked the king.

"I mean that at this hour the headsman has been got out of the way by force or persuasion. The scaffold will be ready by to-morrow, but the headsman will be wanting and they will put it off till the day after to-morrow."

"What then?" said the king.

"To-morrow night we shall rescue you."

"How can that be?" cried the king, whose face was lighted up, in spite of himself, by a flash of joy.

"Oh! sir," cried Parry, "may you and yours be blessed!"

"How can it be?" repeated the king. "I must know, so that I may assist you if there is any chance."

"I know nothing about it," continued Aramis, "but the cleverest, the bravest, the most devoted of us four said to me when I left him, 'Tell the king that to-morrow, at ten o'clock at night, we shall carry him off.' He has said it and will do it."

"Tell me the name of that generous friend," said the king, "that I may cherish for him an eternal gratitude, whether he succeeds or not."

"D'Artagnan, sire, the same who had so nearly rescued you when Colonel Harrison made his untimely entrance."

"You are, indeed, wonderful men," said the king; "if such

things had been related to me I should not have believed them."

"Now, sire," resumed Aramis, "listen to me. Do not forget for a single instant that we are watching over your safety; observe the smallest gesture, the least bit of song, the least sign from any one near you; watch everything, hear everything, interpret everything."

"Oh, chevalier!" cried the king, "what can I say to you? There is no word, though it should come from the profoundest depth of my heart, that can express my gratitude. If you succeed I do not say that you will save a king; no, in presence of the scaffold as I am, royalty, I assure you, is a very small affair; but you will save a husband to his wife, a father to his children. Chevalier, take my hand; it is that of a friend who will love you to his last sigh."

Aramis stooped to kiss the king's hand, but Charles clasped his and pressed it to his heart.

At this moment a man entered, without even knocking at the door. Aramis tried to withdraw his hand, but the king still held it. The man was one of those Puritans, half preacher and half soldier, who swarmed around Cromwell.

"What do you want, sir?" said the king.

"I desire to know if the confession of Charles Stuart is at an end?" said the stranger.

"And what is it to you?" replied the king; "we are not of the same religion."

"All men are brothers," said the Puritan. "One of my brothers is about to die and I come to prepare him."

"Bear with him," whispered Aramis; "it is doubtless some spy."

"After my reverend lord bishop," said the king to the man, "I shall hear you with pleasure, sir."

The man retired, but not before examining the supposed Juxon with an attention which did not escape the king.

"Chevalier," said the king, when the door was closed, "I believe you are right and that this man only came here with evil intentions. Take care that no misfortune befalls you when you leave."

"I thank your majesty," said Aramis, "but under these robes I have a coat of mail, a pistol and a dagger."

"Go, then, sir, and God keep you!"

The king accompanied him to the door, where Aramis pronounced his benediction upon him, and passing through the ante-rooms, filled with soldiers, jumped into his carriage and drove to the bishop's palace. Juxon was waiting for him impatiently.

"Well?" said he, on perceiving Aramis.

"Everything has succeeded as I expected; spies, guards, satellites, all took me for you and the king blesses you while waiting for you to bless him."

"May God protect you, my son; for your example has given me at the same time hope and courage."

Aramis resumed his own attire and left Juxon with the assurance that he might again have recourse to him.

He had scarcely gone ten yards in the street when he perceived that he was followed by a man, wrapped in a large cloak. He placed his hand on his dagger and stopped. The man came straight toward him. It was Porthos.

"My dear friend," cried Aramis.

"You see, we had each our mission," said Porthos; "mine was to guard you and I am doing so. Have you seen the king?"

"Yes, and all goes well."

"We are to meet our friends at the hotel at eleven."

It was then striking half-past ten by St. Paul's.

Arrived at the hotel it was not long before Athos entered.

"All's well," he cried, as he entered; "I have hired a cedar wherry, as light as a canoe, as easy on the wing as any swallow. It is waiting for us at Greenwich, opposite the Isle of Dogs, manned by a captain and four men, who for the sum of fifty pounds sterling will keep themselves at our disposition three successive nights. Once on board we drop down the Thames and in two hours are on the open sea. In case I am killed, the captain's name is Roger and the skiff is called the *Lightning*. A handkerchief, tied at the four corners, is to be the signal."

Next moment D'Artagnan entered.

"Empty your pockets," said he; "I want a hundred pounds, and as for my own ——" and he emptied them inside out.

The sum was collected in a minute. D'Artagnan ran out and returned directly after.

"There," said he, "it's done. Ough! and not without a deal of trouble, too."

"Has the executioner left London?" asked Athos.

"Ah, you see that plan was not sure enough; he might go out by one gate and return by another."

"Where is he, then?"

"In the cellar."

"The cellar — what cellar?"

"Our landlord's, to be sure. Musqueton is propped against the door and here's the key."

"Bravo!" said Aramis; "how did you manage it?"

"Like everything else, with money; but it cost me dear."

"How much?" asked Athos.

"Five hundred pounds."

"And where did you get so much money?" said Athos.

"Had you, then, that sum?"

"The queen's famous diamond," answered D'Artagnan, with a sigh.

"Ah, true," said Aramis. "I recognized it on your finger."

"You bought it back, then, from Monsieur des Essarts?" asked Porthos.

"Yes, but it was fated that I should not keep it."

"So, then, we are all right as regards the executioner," said Athos; "but unfortunately every executioner has his assistant, his man, or whatever you call him."

"And this one had his," said D'Artagnan; "but, as good luck would have it, just as I thought I should have two affairs to manage, our friend was brought home with a broken leg. In the excess of his zeal he had accompanied the cart containing the scaffolding as far as the king's

window and one of the crossbeams fell on his leg and broke it."

"Ah!" cried Aramis, "that accounts for the cry I heard."

"Probably," said D'Artagnan; "but as he is a thoughtful young man he promised to send four expert workmen in his place to help those already at the scaffold, and wrote the moment he was brought home to Master Tom Lowe, an assistant carpenter and friend of his, to go down to Whitehall, with three of his friends. Here's the letter he sent by a messenger, for sixpence, who sold it to me for a guinea."

"And what on earth are you going to do with it?" asked Athos.

"Can't you guess, my dear Athos? You, who speak English like John Bull himself, are Master Tom Lowe, we, your three companions. Do you understand it *now*?"

Athos uttered a cry of joy and admiration, ran to a closet and drew forth workmen's clothes, which the four friends immediately put on; they then left the hotel, Athos carrying a saw, Porthos a vise, Aramis an axe and D'Artagnan a hammer and some nails.

The letter from the executioner's assistant satisfied the master carpenter that those were the men he expected.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE WORKMEN.

TOWARD midnight Charles heard a great noise beneath his window. It arose from blows of hammer and hatchet, clinking of pincers and cranching of saws.

Lying dressed upon his bed, the noise awoke him with a start and found a gloomy echo in his heart. He could not endure it and sent Parry to ask the sentinel to beg the workmen to strike more gently and not disturb the last slumber of one who had been their king. The sentinel was unwilling to leave his post, but allowed Parry to pass.

Arriving at the window Parry found an unfinished scaffold, over which they were nailing a covering of black serge. Raised to the height of twenty feet, so as to be on a level with the window, it had two lower stories. Parry, odious as was this sight to him, sought for those among some eight or ten workmen who were making the most noise; and fixed on two men, who were loosening the last hooks of the iron balcony.

"My friends," said Parry, mounting the scaffold and standing beside them, "would you work a little more quietly? The king wishes to get a sleep."

One of the two, who was standing up, was of gigantic size and was driving a pick with all his might into the wall, whilst the other, kneeling beside him, was collecting the pieces of stone. The face of the first was lost to Parry in the darkness; but as the second turned around and placed his finger on his lips Parry started back in amazement.

"Very well, very well," said the workman aloud, in excellent English. "Tell the king that if he sleeps badly to-night he will sleep better to-morrow night."

These blunt words, so terrible if taken literally, were received by the other workmen with a roar of laughter. But Parry withdrew, thinking he was dreaming.

Charles was impatiently awaiting his return. At the moment he re-entered, the sentinel who guarded the door put his head through the opening, curious as to what the king was doing. The king was lying on his bed, resting on his elbow. Parry closed the door and approaching the king, his face radiant with joy :

"Sire," he said, in a low voice, "do you know who these workmen are who are making so much noise?"

"I? No; how would you have me know?"

Parry bent his head and whispered to the king: "It is the Comte de la Fère and his friends."

"Raising my scaffold!" cried the king, astounded.

"Yes, and at the same time making a hole in the wall."

The king clasped his hands and raised his eyes to Heaven; then leaping down from his bed he went to the window, and pulling aside the curtain tried to distinguish the figures outside, but in vain.

Parry was not wrong. It was Athos he had recognized, and Porthos who was boring a hole through the wall.

This hole communicated with a kind of loft—the space between the floor of the king's room and the ceiling of the one below it. Their plan was to pass through the hole they were making into this loft and cut out from below a piece of the flooring of the king's room, so as to form a kind of trap-door.

Through this the king was to escape the next night and, hidden by the black covering of the scaffold, was to change his dress for that of a workman, slip out with his deliverers, pass the sentinels, who would suspect nothing, and so reach the skiff that was waiting for him at Greenwich.

Day gilded the tops of the houses. The aperture was finished and Athos passed through it, carrying the clothes destined for the king wrapped in black cloth, and the tools with which he was to open a communication with the king's

room. He had only two hours' work to do to open communication with the king and, according to the calculations of the four friends, they had the entire day before them, since, the executioner being absent, another must be sent for to Bristol.

D'Artagnan returned to change his workman's clothes for his chestnut-colored suit, and Porthos to put on his red doublet. As for Aramis, he went off to the bishop's palace to see if he could possibly pass in with Juxon to the king's presence. All three agreed to meet at noon in Whitehall Place to see how things went on.

Before leaving the scaffold Aramis had approached the opening where Athos was concealed to tell him that he was about to make an attempt to gain another interview with the king.

"Adieu, then, and be of good courage," said Athos. "Report to the king the condition of affairs. Say to him that when he is alone it will help us if he will knock on the floor, for then I can continue my work in safety. Try, Aramis, to keep near the king. Speak loud, very loud, for they will be listening at the door. If there is a sentinel within the apartment kill him without hesitation. If there are two, let Parry kill one and you the other. If there are three, let yourself be slain, but save the king."

"Be easy," said Aramis; "I will take two poniards and give one to Parry. Is that all?"

"Yes, go; but urge the king strongly not to stand on false generosity. While you are fighting, if there is a fight, he must flee. The trap once replaced over his head, you being on the trap, dead or alive, they will need at least ten minutes to find the hole by which he has escaped. In those ten minutes we shall have gained the road and the king will be saved."

"Everything shall be done as you say, Athos. Your hand, for perhaps we shall not see each other again."

Athos put his arm around Aramis's neck and embraced him.

"For you," he said. "Now if I die, say to D'Artagnan that I love him as a son, and embrace him for me. Embrace also our good and brave Porthos. Adieu."

"Adieu," said Aramis. "I am as sure now that the king will be saved as I am sure that I clasp the most loyal hand in the world."

Aramis parted from Athos, went down from the scaffold in his turn and took his way to the hotel, whistling the air of a song in praise of Cromwell. He found the other two friends sitting at table before a good fire, drinking a bottle of port and devouring a cold chicken. Porthos was cursing the infamous parliamentarians; D'Artagnan ate in silence, revolving in his mind the most audacious plans.

Aramis related what had been agreed upon. D'Artagnan approved with a movement of the head and Porthos with his voice.

"Bravo!" he said; "besides, we shall be there at the time of the flight. What with D'Artagnan, Grimaud and Musqueton, we can manage to dispatch eight of them. I say nothing about Blaisois, for he is only fit to hold the horses. Two minutes a man makes four minutes. Musqueton will lose another, that's five; and in five minutes we shall have galloped a quarter of a league."

Aramis swallowed a hasty mouthful, gulped a glass of wine and changed his clothes.

"Now," said he, "I'm off to the bishop's. Take care of the executioner, D'Artagnan."

"All right. Grimaud has relieved Musqueton and has his foot on the cellar door."

"Well, don't be inactive."

"Inactive, my dear fellow! Ask Porthos. I pass my life upon my legs."

Aramis again presented himself at the bishop's. Juxon consented the more readily to take him with him, as he would require an assistant priest in case the king should wish to communicate. Dressed as Aramis had been the night before, the bishop got into his carriage, and the

former, more disguised by his pallor and sad countenance than his deacon's dress, got in by his side. The carriage stopped at the door of the palace.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning.

Nothing was changed. The ante-rooms were still full of soldiers, the passages still lined by guards. The king was already sanguine, but when he perceived Aramis his hope turned to joy. He embraced Juxon and pressed the hand of Aramis. The bishop affected to speak in a loud voice, before every one, of their previous interview. The king replied that the words spoken in that interview had borne their fruit and that he desired another under the same conditions. Juxon turned to those present and begged them to leave him and his assistant alone with the king. Every one withdrew. As soon as the door was closed:

"Sire," said Aramis, speaking rapidly, "you are saved; the London executioner has vanished. His assistant broke his leg last night beneath your majesty's window — the cry we heard was his — and there is no executioner nearer at hand than Bristol."

"But the Comte de la Fère?" asked the king.

"Two feet below you; take the poker from the fireplace and strike three times on the floor. He will answer you."

The king did so and the moment after, three muffled knocks, answering the given signal, sounded beneath the floor.

"So," said Charles, "he who knocks down there ——"

"Is the Comte de la Fère, sire," said Aramis. "He is preparing a way for your majesty to escape. Parry, for his part, will raise this slab of marble and a passage will be opened."

"Oh, Juxon," said the king, seizing the bishop's two hands in his own, "promise that you will pray all your life for this gentleman and for the other that you hear beneath your feet, and for two others also, who, wherever they may be, are on the watch for my safety."

"Sire," replied Juxon, "you shall be obeyed."

Meanwhile, the miner underneath was heard working away incessantly, when suddenly an unexpected noise resounded in the passage. Aramis seized the poker and gave the signal to stop; the noise came nearer and nearer. It was that of a number of men steadily approaching. The four men stood motionless. All eyes were fixed on the door, which opened slowly and with a kind of solemnity.

A parliamentary officer, clothed in black and with a gravity that augured ill, entered, bowed to the king, and unfolding a parchment read the sentence, as is usually done to criminals before their execution.

"What is this?" said Aramis to Juxon.

Juxon replied with a sign which meant that he knew no more than Aramis about it.

"Then it is for to-day?" asked the king.

"Was not your majesty warned that it was to take place this morning?"

"Then I must die like a common criminal by the hand of the London executioner?"

"The London executioner has disappeared, your majesty, but a man has offered his services instead. The execution will therefore only be delayed long enough for you to arrange your spiritual and temporal affairs."

A slight moisture on his brow was the only trace of emotion that Charles evinced, as he learned these tidings. But Aramis was livid. His heart ceased beating, he closed his eyes and leaned upon the table. Charles perceived it and took his hand.

"Come, my friend," said he, "courage." Then he turned to the officer. "Sir, I am ready. There is but little reason why I should delay you. Firstly, I wish to communicate; secondly, to embrace my children and bid them farewell for the last time. Will this be permitted me?"

"Certainly," replied the officer, and left the room.

Aramis dug his nails into his flesh and groaned aloud.

"Oh! my lord bishop," he cried, seizing Juxon's hands, "where is Providence? where is Providence?"

"My son," replied the bishop, with firmness, "you see Him not, because the passions of the world conceal Him."

"My son," said the king to Aramis, "do not take it so to heart. You ask what God is doing. God beholds your devotion and my martyrdom, and believe me, both will have their reward. Ascribe to men, then, what is happening, and not to God. It is men who drive me to death; it is men who make you weep."

"Yes, sire," said Aramis, "yes, you are right. It is men whom I should hold responsible, and I will hold them responsible."

"Be seated, Juxon," said the king, falling upon his knees. "I have now to confess to you. Remain, sir," he added to Aramis, who had moved to leave the room. "Remain, Parry. I have nothing to say that cannot be said before all."

Juxon sat down and the king, kneeling humbly before him, began his confession.

CHAPTER LXVI.

REMEMBER!

THE mob had already assembled when the confession terminated. The king's children next arrived — the Princess Charlotte, a beautiful, fair-haired child, with tears in her eyes, and the Duke of Gloucester, a boy eight or nine years old, whose tearless eyes and curling lip revealed a growing pride. He had wept all night long, but would not show his grief before the people.

Charles's heart melted within him at the sight of those two children, whom he had not seen for two years and whom he now met at the moment of death. He turned to brush away a tear and then, summoning up all his firmness, drew his daughter toward him, recommending her to be pious and resigned. Then he took the boy upon his knee.

"My son," he said to him, "you saw a great number of people in the streets as you came here. These men are going to behead your father. Do not forget that. Perhaps some day they will want to make you king, instead of the Prince of Wales, or the Duke of York, your elder brothers. But you are not the king, my son, and can never be so while they are alive. Swear to me, then, never to let them put a crown upon your head unless you have a legal right to the crown. For one day — listen, my son — one day, if you do so, they will doom you to destruction, head and crown, too, and then you will not be able to die with a calm conscience, as I die. Swear, my son."

The child stretched out his little hand toward that of his father and said, "I swear to your majesty."

"Henry," said Charles, "call me your father."

"Father," replied the child, "I swear to you that they shall kill me sooner than make me king."

"Good, my child. Now kiss me; and you, too, Charlotte. Never forget me."

"Oh! never, never!" cried both the children, throwing their arms around their father's neck.

"Farewell," said Charles, "farewell, my children. Take them away, Juxon; their tears will deprive me of the courage to die."

Juxon led them away, and this time the doors were left open.

Meanwhile, Athos, in his concealment, waited in vain the signal to recommence his work. Two long hours he waited in terrible inaction. A deathlike silence reigned in the room above. At last he determined to discover the cause of this stillness. He crept from his hole and stood, hidden by the black drapery, beneath the scaffold. Peeping out from the drapery, he could see the rows of halberdiers and musketeers around the scaffold and the first ranks of the populace swaying and groaning like the sea.

"What is the matter, then?" he asked himself, trembling more than the wind-swayed cloth he was holding back. "The people are hurrying on, the soldiers under arms, and among the spectators I see D'Artagnan. What is he waiting for? What is he looking at? Good God! have they allowed the headsman to escape?"

Suddenly the dull beating of muffled drums filled the square. The sound of heavy steps was heard above his head. The next moment the very planks of the scaffold creaked with the weight of an advancing procession and the eager faces of the spectators confirmed what a last hope at the bottom of his heart had prevented him till then believing. At the same moment a well-known voice above him pronounced these words:

"Colonel, I want to speak to the people."

Athos shuddered from head to foot. It was the king speaking on the scaffold.

In fact, after taking a few drops of wine and a piece of bread, Charles, weary of waiting for death, had suddenly decided to go to meet it and had given the signal for movement. Then the two wings of the window facing the square had been thrown open and the people had seen silently advancing from the interior of the vast chamber, first, a masked man, who, carrying an axe in his hand, was recognized as the executioner. He approached the block and laid his axe upon it. Behind him, pale indeed, but marching with a firm step, was Charles Stuart, who advanced between two priests, followed by a few superior officers appointed to preside at the execution and attended by two files of partisans who took their places on opposite sides of the scaffold.

The sight of the masked man gave rise to a prolonged sensation. Every one was full of curiosity as to who that unknown executioner could be who presented himself so opportunely to assure to the people the promised spectacle, when the people believed it had been postponed until the following day. All gazed at him searchingly.

But they could discern nothing but a man of middle height, dressed in black, apparently of a certain age, for the end of a gray beard peeped out from the bottom of the mask that hid his features.

The king's request had undoubtedly been acceded to by an affirmative sign, for in firm, sonorous accents, which vibrated in the depths of Athos's heart, the king began his speech, explaining his conduct and counseling the welfare of the kingdom.

"Oh!" said Athos to himself, "is it indeed possible that I hear what I hear and that I see what I see? Is it possible that God has abandoned His representative on earth and left him to die thus miserably? And I have not seen him! I have not said adieu to him!"

A noise was heard like that the instrument of death would make if moved upon the block.

"Do not touch the axe," said the king, and resumed his speech.

At the end of his speech the king looked tenderly around upon the people. Then unfastening the diamond ornament which the queen had sent him, he placed it in the hands of the priest who accompanied Juxon. Then he drew from his breast a little cross set in diamonds, which, like the order, had been the gift of Henrietta Maria.

"Sir," said he to the priest, "I shall keep this cross in my hand till the last moment. Take it from me when I am—dead."

"Yes, sire," said a voice, which Athos recognized as that of Aramis.

He then took his hat from his head and threw it on the ground. One by one he undid the buttons of his doublet, took it off and deposited it by the side of his hat. Then, as it was cold, he asked for his gown, which was brought to him.

All the preparations were made with a frightful calmness. One would have thought the king was going to bed and not to his coffin.

"Will these be in your way?" he said to the executioner, raising his long locks; "if so, they can be tied up."

Charles accompanied these words with a look designed to penetrate the mask of the unknown headsman. His calm, noble gaze forced the man to turn away his head. But after the searching look of the king he encountered the burning eyes of Aramis.

The king, seeing that he did not reply, repeated his question.

"It will do," replied the man, in a tremulous voice, "if you separate them across the neck."

The king parted his hair with his hands, and looking at the block he said:

"This block is very low; is there no other to be had?"

"It is the usual block," answered the man in the mask.

"Do you think you can behead me with a single blow?" asked the king.

"I hope so," was the reply. There was something so



strange in these three words that everybody, except the king, shuddered.

"I do not wish to be taken by surprise," added the king. "I shall kneel down to pray; do not strike then."

"When shall I strike?"

"When I shall lay my head on the block and say '*Remember!*' then strike boldly."

"Gentlemen," said the king to those around him, "I leave you to brave the tempest; I go before you to a kingdom which knows no storms. Farewell."

He looked at Aramis and made a special sign to him with his head.

"Now," he continued, "withdraw a little and let me say my prayer, I beseech you. You, also, stand aside," he said to the masked man. "It is only for a moment and I know that I belong to you; but remember that you are not to strike till I give the signal."

Then he knelt down, made the sign of the cross, and lowering his face to the planks, as if he would have kissed them, said in a low tone, in French, "Comte de la Fère, are you there?"

"Yes, your majesty," he answered, trembling.

"Faithful friend, noble heart!" said the king, "I should not have been rescued. I have addressed my people and I have spoken to God; last of all I speak to you. To maintain a cause which I believed sacred I have lost the throne and my children their inheritance. A million in gold remains; it is buried in the cellars of Newcastle Keep. You only know that this money exists. Make use of it, then, whenever you think it will be most useful, for my eldest son's welfare. And now, farewell."

"Farewell, saintly, martyred majesty," lisped Athos, chilled with terror.

A moment's silence ensued and then, in a full, sonorous voice, the king exclaimed: "*Remember!*"

He had scarcely uttered the word when a heavy blow shook the scaffold and where Athos stood immovable a

warm drop fell upon his brow. He reeled back with a shudder and the same moment the drops became a crimson cataract.

Athos fell on his knees and remained some minutes as if bewildered or stunned. At last he rose and taking his handkerchief steeped it in the blood of the martyred king. Then as the crowd gradually dispersed he leaped down, crept from behind the drapery, glided between two horses, mingled with the crowd and was the first to arrive at the inn.

Having gained his room he raised his hand to his face, and observing that his fingers were covered with the monarch's blood, fell down insensible.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE MAN IN THE MASK.

THE SNOW was falling thick and icy. Aramis was the next to come in and to discover Athos almost insensible. But at the first words he uttered the comte roused himself from the kind of lethargy in which he had sunk.

"Well," said Aramis, "beaten by fate!"

"Beaten!" said Athos. "Noble and unhappy king!"

"Are you wounded?" cried Aramis.

"No, this is his blood."

"Where were you, then?"

"Where you left me — under the scaffold."

"Did you see it all?"

"No, but I heard all. God preserve me from another such hour as I have just passed."

"Then you know that I did not leave him?"

"I heard your voice up to the last moment."

"Here is the order he gave me and the cross I took from his hand; he desired they should be returned to the queen."

"Then here is a handkerchief to wrap them in," replied Athos, drawing from his pocket the one he had steeped in the king's blood.

"And what," he continued, "has been done with the poor body?"

"By order of Cromwell royal honors will be accorded to it. The doctors are embalming the corpse, and when it is ready it will be placed in a lighted chapel."

"Mockery," muttered Athos, savagely; "royal honors to one whom they have murdered!"

"Well, cheer up!" said a loud voice from the staircase,

which Porthos had just mounted. "We are all mortal, my poor friends."

"You are late, my dear Porthos."

"Yes, there were some people on the way who delayed me. The wretches were dancing. I took one of them by the throat and three-quarters throttled him. Just then a patrol rode up. Luckily the man I had had most to do with was some minutes before he could speak, so I took advantage of his silence to walk off."

"Have you seen D'Artagnan?"

"We got separated in the crowd and I could not find him again."

"Oh!" said Athos, satirically, "I saw him. He was in the front row of the crowd, admirably placed for seeing; and as on the whole the sight was curious, he probably wished to stay to the end."

"Ah! Comte de la Fère," said a calm voice, though hoarse with running, "is it your habit to calumniate the absent?"

This reproof stung Athos to the heart, but as the impression produced by seeing D'Artagnan foremost in a coarse, ferocious crowd had been very strong, he contented himself with replying:

"I am not calumniating you, my friend. They were anxious about you here; I simply told them where you were. You didn't know King Charles; to you he was only a foreigner and you were not obliged to love him."

So saying, he stretched out his hand, but the other pretended not to see it and he let it drop again slowly by his side.

"Ugh! I am tired," cried D'Artagnan, sitting down.

"Drink a glass of port," said Aramis; "it will refresh you."

"Yes, let us drink," said Athos, anxious to make it up by hobnobbing with D'Artagnan, "let us drink and get away from this hateful country. The felucca is waiting for us, you know; let us leave to-night, we have nothing more to do here."

"You are in a hurry, sir count," said D'Artagnan.

"But what would you have us to do here, now that the king is dead?"

"Go, sir count," replied D'Artagnan, carelessly; "you see nothing to keep you a little longer in England? Well, for my part, I, a bloodthirsty ruffian, who can go and stand close to a scaffold, in order to have a better view of the king's execution — I remain."

Athos turned pale. Every reproach his friend uttered struck deeply in his heart.

"Ah! you remain in London?" said Porthos.

"Yes. And you?"

"Hang it!" said Porthos, a little perplexed between the two, "I suppose, as I came with you, I must go away with you. I can't leave you alone in this abominable country."

"Thanks, my worthy friend. So I have a little adventure to propose to you when the count is gone. I want to find out who was the man in the mask, who so obligingly offered to cut the king's throat."

"A man in a mask?" cried Athos. "You did not let the executioner escape, then?"

"The executioner is still in the cellar, where, I presume, he has had an interview with mine host's bottles. But you remind me. Musqueton!"

"Sir," answered a voice from the depths of the earth.

"Let out your prisoner. All is over."

"But," said Athos, "who is the wretch that has dared to raise his hand against his king?"

"An amateur headsman," replied Aramis, "who, however, does not handle the axe amiss."

"Did you not see his face?" asked Athos.

"He wore a mask."

"But you, Aramis, who were close to him?"

"I could see nothing but a gray beard under the fringe of the mask."

"Then it must be a man of a certain age."

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, "that matters little. When one puts on a mask, it is not difficult to wear a beard under it."

"I am sorry I did not follow him," said Porthos.

"Well, my dear Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "that's the very thing it came into my head to do."

Athos understood all now.

"Pardon me, D'Artagnan," he said. "I have distrusted God; I could the more easily distrust you. Pardon me, my friend."

"We will see about that presently," said D'Artagnan, with a slight smile.

"Well, then?" said Aramis.

"Well, while I was watching — not the king, as monsieur le comte thinks, for I know what it is to see a man led to death, and though I ought to be accustomed to the sight it always makes me ill — while I was watching the masked executioner, the idea came to me, as I said, to find out who he was. Now, as we are wont to complete ourselves each by all the rest and to depend on one another for assistance, as one calls his other hand to aid the first, I looked around instinctively to see if Porthos was there; for I had seen you, Aramis, with the king, and you, count, I knew would be under the scaffold, and for that reason I forgive you," he added, offering Athos his hand, "for you must have suffered much. I was looking around for Porthos when I saw near me a head which had been broken, but which, for better or worse, had been patched with plaster and with black silk. 'Humph!' thought I, 'that looks like my handiwork; I fancy I must have mended that skull somewhere or other.' And, in fact, it was that unfortunate Scotchman, Parry's brother, you know, on whom Groslow amused himself by trying his strength. Well, this man was making signs to another at my left, and turning around I recognized the honest Grimaud. 'Oh!' said I to him. Grimaud turned around with a jerk, recognized me, and pointed to the man in the mask. 'Eh!' said he, which meant, 'Do you see him?' '*Parbleu!*' I answered and we perfectly understood one another. Well, everything was finished as you know. The mob dispersed. I made a sign to Grimaud and the Scotchman and we all

three retired into a corner of the square. I saw the executioner return into the king's room, change his clothes, put on a black hat and a large cloak and disappear. Five minutes later he came down the grand staircase."

"You followed him?" cried Athos.

"I should think so, but not without difficulty. Every few minutes he turned around, and thus obliged us to conceal ourselves. I might have gone up to him and killed him. But I am not selfish, and I thought it might console you all a little to have a share in the matter. So we followed him through the lowest streets in the city and in half an hour's time he stopped before a little isolated house. Grimaud drew out a pistol. 'Eh?' said he, showing it. I held back his arm. The man in the mask stopped before a low door and drew out a key; but before he placed it in the lock he turned around to see if he was being followed. Grimaud and I got behind a tree and the Scotchman, having nowhere to hide himself, threw himself on his face in the road. Next moment the door opened and the man disappeared."

"The scoundrel!" said Aramis. "While you have been returning hither he will have escaped and we shall never find him."

"Come, now, Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "you must be taking me for some one else."

"Nevertheless," said Athos, "in your absence ——"

"Well, in my absence haven't I put in my place Grimaud and the Scotchman? Before he had taken ten steps beyond the door I had examined the house on all sides. At one of the doors, that by which he had entered, I placed our Scotchman, making a sign to him to follow the man wherever he might go, if he came out again. Then going around the house I placed Grimaud at the other exit and here I am. Our game is beaten up. Now for the tally-ho."

Athos threw himself into D'Artagnan's arms.

"Friend," he said, "you have been too good in pardoning me; I was wrong, a hundred times wrong. I ought to have known you better by this time; but we are all possessed of a malignant spirit, which bids us doubt."

"Humph!" said Porthos. "Don't you think the executioner might be Master Cromwell, who, to make sure of this affair, undertook it himself?"

"Ah! just so. Cromwell is stout and short and this man thin and lanky, rather tall than otherwise."

"Some condemned soldier, perhaps," suggested Athos, "whom they have pardoned at the price of regicide."

"No, no," continued D'Artagnan, "it was not the measured step of a foot soldier, nor was it the gait of a horseman. If I am not mistaken we have to do with a gentleman."

"A gentleman!" exclaimed Athos. "Impossible! It would be a dishonor to all the nobility."

"Fine sport, by Jove!" cried Porthos, with a laugh that shook the windows. "Fine sport!"

"Are you still bent on departure, Athos?" asked D'Artagnan.

"No, I remain," replied Athos, with a threatening gesture that promised no good to whomsoever it was addressed.

"Swords, then!" cried Aramis, "swords! let us not lose a moment."

The four friends resumed their own clothes, girded on their swords, ordered Musqueton and Blaisois to pay the bill and to arrange everything for immediate departure, and wrapped in their large cloaks left in search of their game.

The night was dark, snow was falling, the streets were silent and deserted. D'Artagnan led the way through the intricate windings and narrow alleys of the city and ere long they had reached the house in question. For a moment D'Artagnan thought that Parry's brother had disappeared; but he was mistaken. The robust Scotchman, accustomed to the snows of his native hills, had stretched himself against a post, and like a fallen statue, insensible to the inclemency of the weather, had allowed the snow to cover him. He rose, however, as they approached.

"Come," said Athos, "here's another good servant. Really, honest men are not so scarce as I thought."

"Don't be in a hurry to weave crowns for our Scotchman. I believe the fellow is here on his own account, for I have heard that these gentlemen born beyond the Tweed are very vindictive. I should not like to be Groslow, if he meets him."

"Well?" said Athos, to the man, in English.

"No one has come out," he replied.

"Then, Porthos and Aramis, will you remain with this man while we go around to Grimaud?"

Grimaud had made himself a kind of sentry box out of a hollow willow, and as they drew near he put his head out and gave a low whistle.

"Soho!" cried Athos.

"Yes," said Grimaud.

"Well, has anybody come out?"

"No, but somebody has gone in."

"A man or a woman?"

"A man."

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan, "there are two of them, then!"

"I wish there were four," said Athos; "the two parties would then be equal."

"Perhaps there are four," said D'Artagnan.

"What do you mean?"

"Other men may have entered before them and waited for them."

"We can find out," said Grimaud. At the same time he pointed to a window, through the shutters of which a faint light streamed.

"That is true," said D'Artagnan, "let us call the others."

They returned around the house to fetch Porthos and Aramis.

"Have you seen anything?" they asked.

"No, but we are going to," replied D'Artagnan, pointing to Grimaud, who had already climbed some five or six feet from the ground.

All four came up together. Grimaud continued to climb

like a cat and succeeded at last in catching hold of a hook, which served to keep one of the shutters back when opened. Then resting his foot on a small ledge he made a sign to show all was right.

"Well?" asked D'Artagnan.

Grimaud showed his closed hand, with two fingers spread out.

"Speak," said Athos; "we cannot see your signs. How many are there?"

"Two. One opposite to me, the other with his back to me."

"Good. And the man opposite to you is ——"

"The man I saw go in."

"Do you know him?"

"I thought I recognized him, and was not mistaken. Short and stout."

"Who is it?" they all asked together in a low tone.

"General Oliver Cromwell."

The four friends looked at one another.

"And the other?" asked Athos.

"Thin and lanky."

"The executioner," said D'Artagnan and Aramis at the same time.

"I can see nothing but his back," resumed Grimaud.

"But wait. He is moving; and if he has taken off his mask I shall be able to see. Ah ——"

And as if struck in the heart he let go the hook and dropped with a groan.

"Did you see him?" they all asked.

"Yes," said Grimaud, with his hair standing on end.

"The thin, spare man?"

"Yes."

"The executioner, in short?" asked Aramis.

"Yes."

"And who is it?" said Porthos.

"He — he — is ——" murmured Grimaud, pale as a ghost and seizing his master's hand.

"Who? He?" asked Athos.

"Mordaunt," replied Grimaud.

D'Artagnan, Porthos and Aramis uttered a cry of joy.

Athos stepped back and passed his hand across his brow.

"Fatality!" he muttered.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

CROMWELL'S HOUSE.

It was, in fact, Mordaunt whom D'Artagnan had followed, without knowing it. On entering the house he had taken off his mask and imitation beard, then, mounting a staircase, had opened a door, and in a room lighted by a single lamp found himself face to face with a man seated behind a desk.

This man was Cromwell.

Cromwell had two or three of these retreats in London, unknown except to the most intimate of his friends. Mordaunt was among these.

"It is you, Mordaunt," he said. "You are late."

"General, I wished to see the ceremony to the end, which delayed me."

"Ah! I scarcely thought you were so curious as that."

"I am always curious to see the downfall of your honor's enemies and *he* was not among the least of them. But you, general, were you not at Whitehall?"

"No," said Cromwell.

There was a moment's silence.

"Have you had any account of it?"

"None. I have been here since the morning. I only know that there was a conspiracy to rescue the king."

"Ah, you knew that?" said Mordaunt.

"It matters little. Four men, disguised as workmen, were to get the king out of prison and take him to Greenwich, where a vessel was waiting."

"And knowing all that, your honor remained here, far from the city, tranquil and inactive."

"Tranquil, yes," replied Cromwell. "But who told you I was inactive?"

"But — if the plot had succeeded ? "

"I wished it to do so."

"I thought your excellence considered the death of Charles I. as a misfortune necessary to the welfare of England."

"Yes, his death ; but it would have been more seemly not upon the scaffold."

"Why so ? " asked Mordaunt.

Cromwell smiled. "Because it could have been said that I had had him condemned for the sake of justice and had let him escape out of pity."

"But if he had escaped ? "

"Impossible ; my precautions were taken."

"And does your honor know the four men who undertook to rescue him ? "

"The four Frenchmen, of whom two were sent by the queen to her husband and two by Mazarin to me."

"And do you think Mazarin commissioned them to act as they have done ? "

"It is possible. But he will not avow it."

"How so ? "

"Because they failed."

"Your honor gave me two of these Frenchmen when they were only guilty of fighting for Charles I. Now that they are guilty of a conspiracy against England will your honor give me all four of them ? "

"Take them," said Cromwell.

Mordaunt bowed with a smile of triumphant ferocity.

"Did the people shout at all ? " Cromwell asked.

"Very little, except 'Long live Cromwell ! ' "

"Where were you placed ? "

Mordaunt tried for a moment to read in the general's face if this was simply a useless question, or whether he knew everything. But his piercing eyes could by no means penetrate the sombre depths of Cromwell's.

"I was so situated as to hear and see *everything*," he answered.

It was now Cromwell's turn to look fixedly at Mordaunt and Mordaunt to make himself impenetrable.

"It appears," said Cromwell, "that this improvised executioner did his duty remarkably well. The blow, so they tell me at least, was struck with a master's hand."

Mordaunt remembered that Cromwell had told him he had had no detailed account and he was now quite convinced that the general had been present at the execution, hidden behind some screen or curtain.

"In fact," said Mordaunt, with a calm voice and immovable countenance, "a single blow sufficed."

"Perhaps it was some one in that occupation," said Cromwell.

"Do you think so, sir? He did not look like an executioner."

"And who else save an executioner would have wished to fill that horrible office?"

"But," said Mordaunt, "it might have been some personal enemy of the king, who had made a vow of vengeance and accomplished it in this way. Perhaps it was some man of rank who had grave reasons for hating the fallen king and who, learning that the king was about to flee and escape him, threw himself in the way, with a mask on his face and an axe in his hand, not as substitute for the executioner, but as an ambassador of Fate."

"Possibly."

"And if that were the case would your honor condemn his action?"

"It is not for me to judge. It rests between his conscience and his God."

"But if your honor knew this man?"

"I neither know nor wish to know him. Provided Charles is dead, it is the axe, not the man, we must thank."

"And yet, without the man, the king would have been rescued."

Cromwell smiled.

"They would have carried him to Greenwich," he said, "and put him on board a felucca with five barrels of powder in the hold. Once out to sea, you are too good a politician not to understand the rest, Mordaunt."

"Yes, they would all have been blown up."

"Just so. The explosion would have done what the axe had failed to do. Men would have said that the king had escaped human justice and been overtaken by God's. You see now why I did not care to know your gentleman in the mask; for really, in spite of his excellent intentions, I could not thank him for what he has done."

Mordaunt bowed humbly. "Sir," he said, "you are a profound thinker and your plan was sublime."

"Say absurd, since it has become useless. The only sublime ideas in politics are those which bear fruit. So to-night, Mordaunt, go to Greenwich and ask for the captain of the felucca *Lightning*. Show him a white handkerchief knotted at the four corners and tell the crew to disembark and carry the powder back to the arsenal, unless, indeed —"

"Unless?" said Mordaunt, whose face was lighted by a savage joy as Cromwell spoke.

"This skiff might be of use to you for personal projects."

"Oh, my lord, my lord!"

"That title," said Cromwell, laughing, "is all very well here, but take care a word like that does not escape your lips in public."

"But your honor will soon be called so generally."

"I hope so, at least," said Cromwell, rising and putting on his cloak.

"You are going, sir?"

"Yes," said Cromwell. "I slept here last night and the night before, and you know it is not my custom to sleep three times in the same bed."

"Then," said Mordaunt, "your honor gives me my liberty for to-night?"

"And even for all day to-morrow, if you want it. Since last evening," he added, smiling, "you have done enough in my service, and if you have any personal matters to settle it is just that I should give you time."

"Thank you, sir; it will be well employed, I hope."

Cromwell turned as he was going.

"Are you armed?" he asked.

"I have my sword."

"And no one waiting for you outside?"

"No."

"Then you had better come with me."

"Thank you, sir, but the way by the subterranean passage would take too much time and I have none to lose."

Cromwell placed his hand on a hidden handle and opened a door so well concealed by the tapestry that the most practiced eye could not have discovered it. It closed after him with a spring. This door communicated with a subterranean passage, leading under the street to a grotto in the garden of a house about a hundred yards from that of the future Protector.

It was just before this that Grimaud had perceived the two men seated together.

D'Artagnan was the first to recover from his surprise.

"Mordaunt," he cried. "Ah! by Heaven! it is God Himself who sent us here."

"Yes," said Porthos, "let us break the door in and fall upon him."

"No," replied D'Artagnan, "no noise. Now, Grimaud, you come here, climb up to the window again and tell us if Mordaunt is alone and whether he is preparing to go out or go to bed. If he comes out we shall catch him. If he stays in we will break in the window. It is easier and less noisy than the door."

Grimaud began to scale the wall again.

"Keep guard at the other door, Athos and Aramis. Porthos and I will stay here."

The friends obeyed.

"He is alone," said Grimaud.

"We did not see his companion come out."

"He may have gone by the other door."

"What is he doing?"

"Putting on his cloak and gloves."

"He's ours," muttered D'Artagnan.

Porthos mechanically drew his dagger from the scabbard.

"Put it up again, my friend," said D'Artagnan. "We must proceed in an orderly manner."

"Hush!" said Grimaud, "he is coming out. He has put out the lamp, I can see nothing now."

"Get down then and quickly."

Grimaud leaped down. The snow deadened the noise of his fall.

"Now go and tell Athos and Aramis to stand on each side of the door and clap their hands if they catch him. We will do the same."

The next moment the door opened and Mordaunt appeared on the threshold, face to face with D'Artagnan. Porthos clapped his hands and the other two came running around. Mordaunt was livid, but he uttered no cry nor called for assistance. D'Artagnan quietly pushed him in again and by the light of a lamp on the staircase made him ascend the steps backward one by one, keeping his eyes all the time on Mordaunt's hands, who, however, knowing that it was useless, attempted no resistance. At last they stood face to face in the very room where ten minutes before Mordaunt had been talking to Cromwell.

Porthos came up behind, and unhooking the lamp on the staircase relit that in the room. Athos and Aramis entered last and locked the door behind them.

"Oblige me by taking a seat," said D'Artagnan, pushing a chair toward Mordaunt, who sat down, pale but calm. Aramis, Porthos and D'Artagnan drew their chairs near him. Athos alone kept away and sat in the furthest corner of the room, as if determined to be merely a spectator of the proceedings. He seemed to be quite overcome. Porthos rubbed his hands in feverish impatience. Aramis bit his lips till the blood came.

D'Artagnan alone was calm, at least in appearance.

"Monsieur Mordaunt," he said, "since, after running after one another so long, chance has at last brought us together, let us have a little conversation, if you please."

CHAPTER LXIX.

CONVERSATIONAL.

THOUGH Mordaunt had been so completely taken by surprise and had mounted the stairs in such utter confusion, when once seated he recovered himself, as it were, and prepared to seize any possible opportunity of escape. His eye wandered to a long stout sword on his flank and he instinctively slipped it around within reach of his right hand.

D'Artagnan was waiting for a reply to his remark and said nothing. Aramis muttered to himself, "We shall hear nothing but the usual commonplace things."

Porthos sucked his mustache, muttering, "A good deal of ceremony to-night about crushing an adder." Athos shrunk into his corner, pale and motionless as a *bas-relief*.

The silence, however, could not last forever. So D'Artagnan began :

"Sir," he said, with desperate politeness, "it seems to me that you change your costume almost as rapidly as I have seen the Italian mummers do, whom the Cardinal Mazarin brought over from Bergamo and whom he doubtless took you to see during your travels in France."

Mordaunt did not reply.

"Just now," D'Artagnan continued, "you were disguised — I mean to say, attired — as a murderer, and now ——"

"And now I look very much like a man who is going to be murdered."

"Oh! sir," said D'Artagnan, "how can you talk like that when you are in the company of gentlemen and have such an excellent sword at your side?"

"No sword is excellent enough to be of use against four swords and daggers."

"Well, that is scarcely the question. I had the honor of asking you why you altered your costume. The mask and beard became you very well, and as to the axe, I do not think it would be out of keeping even at this moment. Why, then, have you laid it aside?"

"Because, remembering the scene at Armentières, I thought I should find four axes for one, as I was to meet four executioners."

"Sir," replied D'Artagnan, in the calmest manner possible, "you are very young; I shall therefore overlook your frivolous remarks. What took place at Armentières has no connection whatever with the present occasion. We could scarcely have requested your mother to take a sword and fight us."

"Aha! It is a duel, then?" cried Mordaunt, as if disposed to reply at once to the provocation.

Porthos rose, always ready for this kind of adventure.

"Pardon me," said D'Artagnan. "Do not let us do things in a hurry. We will arrange the matter rather better. Confess, Monsieur Mordaunt, that you are anxious to kill some of us."

"All," replied Mordaunt.

"Then, my dear sir, I am convinced that these gentlemen return your kind wishes and will be delighted to kill you also. Of course they will do so as honorable gentlemen, and the best proof I can furnish is this ——"

So saying, he threw his hat on the ground, pushed back his chair to the wall and bowed to Mordaunt with true French grace.

"At your service, sir," he continued. "My sword is shorter than yours, it's true, but, bah! I think the arm will make up for the sword."

"Halt!" cried Porthos, coming forward. "I begin, and without any rhetoric."

"Allow me, Porthos," said Aramis.

Athos did not move. He might have been taken for a statue. Even his breathing seemed to be arrested.

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "you shall have your turn. Monsieur Mordaunt dislikes you sufficiently not to refuse you afterward. You can see it in his eye. So pray keep your places, like Athos, whose calmness is entirely laudable. Besides, we will have no words about it. I have particular business to settle with this gentleman and I shall and will begin."

Porthos and Aramis drew back, disappointed, and drawing his sword D'Artagnan turned to his adversary :

"Sir, I am waiting for you."

"And for my part, gentlemen, I admire you. You are disputing which shall fight me first, but you do not consult me, who am most concerned in the matter. I hate you all, but not equally. I hope to kill all four of you, but I am more likely to kill the first than the second, the second than the third, and the third than the last. I claim, then, the right to choose my opponent. If you refuse this right you may kill me, but I shall not fight."

"It is but fair," said Porthos and Aramis, hoping he would choose one of them.

Athos and D'Artagnan said nothing, but their silence seemed to imply consent.

"Well, then," said Mordaunt, "I choose for my adversary the man who, not thinking himself worthy to be called Comte de la Fère, calls himself Athos."

Athos sprang up, but after an instant of motionless silence he said, to the astonishment of his friends, "Monsieur Mordaunt, a duel between us is impossible. Submit this honor to somebody else." And he sat down.

"Ah!" said Mordaunt, with a sneer, "there's one who is afraid."

"Zounds!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, bounding toward him, "who says that Athos is afraid?"

"Let him have his say, D'Artagnan," said Athos, with a smile of sadness and contempt.

"Is it your decision, Athos?" resumed the Gascon.

"Irrevocably."

"You hear, sir," said D'Artagnan, turning to Mordaunt. "The Comte de la Fère will not do you the honor of fighting with you. Choose one of us to replace the Comte de la Fère."

"As long as I don't fight with him it is the same to me with whom I fight. Put your names into a hat and draw lots."

"A good idea," said D'Artagnan.

"At least that will conciliate us all," said Aramis.

"I should never have thought of that," said Porthos, "and yet it is very simple."

"Come, Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "write this for us in those neat little characters in which you wrote to Marie Michou that the mother of this gentleman intended to assassinate the Duke of Buckingham."

Mordaunt sustained this new attack without wincing. He stood with his arms folded, apparently as calm as any man could be in such circumstances. If he had not courage he had what is very like it, namely, pride.

Aramis went to Cromwell's desk, tore off three bits of paper of equal size, wrote on the first his own name and on the others those of his two companions, and presented them open to Mordaunt, who by a movement of his head indicated that he left the matter entirely to Aramis. He then rolled them separately and put them in a hat, which he handed to Mordaunt.

Mordaunt put his hand into the hat, took out one of the three papers and disdainfully dropped it on the table without reading it.

"Ah! serpent," muttered D'Artagnan, "I would give my chance of a captaincy in the *mousquetaires* for that to be my name."

Aramis opened the paper and in a voice trembling with hate and vengeance, read "D'Artagnan."

The Gascon uttered a cry of joy and turning to Mordaunt:

"I hope, sir," said he, "you have no objection to make."

"None whatever," replied the other, drawing his sword and resting the point on his boot.

The moment that D'Artagnan saw that his wish was accomplished and his man would not escape him, he recovered his usual tranquillity. He turned up his cuffs neatly and rubbed the sole of his right boot on the floor, but did not fail, however, to remark that Mordaunt was looking about him in a singular manner.

"Are you ready, sir?" he said at last.

"I was waiting for you, sir," said Mordaunt, raising his head and casting at his opponent a look it would be impossible to describe.

"Well, then," said the Gascon, "take care of yourself, for I am not a bad hand at the rapier."

"Nor I either."

"So much the better; that sets my mind at rest. Defend yourself."

"One minute," said the young man. "Give me your word, gentlemen, that you will not attack me otherwise than one after the other."

"Is it to have the pleasure of insulting us that you say that, my little viper?"

"No, but to set my mind at rest, as you observed just now."

"It is for something else than that, I imagine," muttered D'Artagnan, shaking his head doubtfully.

"On the honor of gentlemen," said Aramis and Porthos.

"In that case, gentlemen, have the kindness to retire into the corners, so as to give us ample room. We shall require it."

"Yes, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "we must not leave this person the slightest pretext for behaving badly, which, with all due respect, I fancy he is anxious still to do."

This new attack made no impression on Mordaunt. The space was cleared, the two lamps placed on Cromwell's desk, in order that the combatants might have as much light as possible; and the swords crossed.

D'Artagnan was too good a swordsman to trifle with his opponent. He made a rapid and brilliant feint, which Mordaunt parried.

"Aha!" he cried, with a smile of satisfaction.

And without losing a minute, thinking he saw an opening, he thrust his right in and forced Mordaunt to parry a counter *en quarte* so fine that the point of the weapon might have turned within a wedding ring.

This time it was Mordaunt who smiled.

"Ah, sir," said D'Artagnan, "you have a wicked smile. It must have been the devil who taught it you, was it not?"

Mordaunt replied by trying his opponent's weapon with an amount of strength which the Gascon was astonished to find in a form apparently so feeble; but thanks to a parry no less clever than that which Mordaunt had just achieved, he succeeded in meeting his sword, which slid along his own without touching his chest.

Mordaunt rapidly sprang back a step.

"Ah! you lose ground, you are turning? Well, as you please, I even gain something by it, for I no longer see that wicked smile of yours. You have no idea what a false look you have, particularly when you are afraid. Look at my eyes and you will see what no looking-glass has ever shown you—a frank and honorable countenance."

To this flow of words, not perhaps in the best taste, but characteristic of D'Artagnan, whose principal object was to divert his opponent's attention, Mordaunt did not reply, but continuing to turn around he succeeded in changing places with D'Artagnan.

He smiled more and more sarcastically and his smile began to make the Gascon anxious.

"Come, come," cried D'Artagnan, "we must finish with this," and in his turn he pressed Mordaunt hard, who continued to lose ground, but evidently on purpose and without letting his sword leave the line for a moment. However, as they were fighting in a room and had not space to go on like that forever, Mordaunt's foot at last touched the wall, against which he rested his left hand.

"Ah, this time you cannot lose ground, my fine friend!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "Gentlemen, did you ever see a

scorpion pinned to a wall? No. Well, then, you shall see it now."

In a second D'Artagnan had made three terrible thrusts at Mordaunt, all of which touched, but only pricked him. The three friends looked on, panting and astonished. At last D'Artagnan, having got up too close, stepped back to prepare a fourth thrust, but the moment when, after a fine, quick feint, he was attacking as sharply as lightning, the wall seemed to give way, Mordaunt disappeared through the opening, and D'Artagnan's blade, caught between the panels, shivered like a sword of glass. D'Artagnan sprang back; the wall had closed again.

Mordaunt, in fact, while defending himself, had manœuvred so as to reach the secret door by which Cromwell had left, had felt for the knob with his left hand, pressed it and disappeared.

The Gascon uttered a furious imprecation, which was answered by a wild laugh on the other side of the iron panel.

"Help me, gentlemen," cried D'Artagnan, "we must break in this door."

"It is the devil in person!" said Aramis, hastening forward.

"He escapes us," growled Porthos, pushing his huge shoulder against the hinges, but in vain. "'Sblood! he escapes us."

"So much the better," muttered Athos.

"I thought as much," said D'Artagnan, wasting his strength in useless efforts. "Zounds, I thought as much when the wretch kept moving around the room. I thought he was up to something."

"It's a misfortune, to which his friend, the devil, treats us," said Aramis.

"It's a piece of good fortune sent from Heaven," said Athos, evidently much relieved.

"Really!" said D'Artagnan, abandoning the attempt to burst open the panel after several ineffectual attempts,

"Athos, I cannot imagine how you can talk to us in that way. You cannot understand the position we are in. In this kind of game, not to kill is to let one's self be killed. This fox of a fellow will be sending us a hundred iron-sided beasts who will pick us off like sparrows in this place. Come, come, we must be off. If we stay here five minutes more there's an end of us."

"Yes, you are right."

"But where shall we go?" asked Porthos.

"To the hotel, to be sure, to get our baggage and horses; and from there, if it please God, to France, where, at least, I understand the architecture of the houses."

So, suiting the action to the word, D'Artagnan thrust the remnant of his sword into its scabbard, picked up his hat and ran down the stairs, followed by the others.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE SKIFF "LIGHTNING."

D'ARTAGNAN had judged correctly; Mordaunt felt that he had no time to lose and he lost none. He knew the rapidity of decision and action that characterized his enemies and resolved to act with reference to that. This time the musketeers had an adversary who was worthy of them.

After closing the door carefully behind him Mordaunt glided into the subterranean passage, sheathing on the way his now useless sword, and thus reached the neighboring house, where he paused to examine himself and to take breath.

"Good!" he said, "nothing, almost nothing — scratches, nothing more; two in the arm and one in the breast. The wounds that I make are better than that — witness the executioner of Bethune, my uncle and King Charles. Now, not a second to lose, for a second lost will perhaps save them. They must die — die all together — killed at one stroke by the thunder of men in default of God's. They must disappear, broken, scattered, annihilated. I will run, then, till my legs no longer serve, till my heart bursts in my bosom, but I will arrive before they do."

Mordaunt proceeded at a rapid pace to the nearest cavalry barracks, about a quarter of a league distant. He made that quarter of a league in four or five minutes. Arrived at the barracks he made himself known, took the best horse in the stables, mounted and gained the high road. A quarter of an hour later he was at Greenwich.

"There is the port," he murmured. "That dark point yonder is the Isle of Dogs. Good! I am half an hour in

advance of them, an hour, perhaps. Fool that I was! I have almost killed myself by my needless haste. Now," he added, rising in the stirrups and looking about him, "which, I wonder, is the *Lightning*?"

At this moment, as if in reply to his words, a man lying on a coil of cables rose and advanced a few steps toward him. Mordaunt drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and tying a knot at each corner—the signal agreed upon—waved it in the air and the man came up to him. He was wrapped in a large rough cape, which concealed his form and partly his face.

"Do you wish to go on the water, sir?" said the sailor.

"Yes, just so. Along the Isle of Dogs."

"And perhaps you have a preference for one boat more than another. You would like one that sails as rapidly as ——"

"Lightning," interrupted Mordaunt.

"Then mine is the boat you want, sir. I'm your man."

"I begin to think so, particularly if you have not forgotten a certain signal."

"Here it is, sir," and the sailor took from his coat a handkerchief, tied at each corner.

"Good, quite right!" cried Mordaunt, springing off his horse. "There's not a moment to lose; now take my horse to the nearest inn and conduct me to your vessel."

"But," asked the sailor, "where are your companions? I thought there were four of you."

"Listen to me, sir. I'm not the man you take me for; you are in Captain Rogers's post, are you not? under orders from General Cromwell. Mine, also, are from him!"

"Indeed, sir, I recognize you; you are Captain Mordaunt."

Mordaunt was startled.

"Oh, fear nothing," said the skipper, showing his face. "I am a friend."

"Captain Groslow!" cried Mordaunt.

"Himself. The general remembered that I had formerly

been a naval officer and he gave me the command of this expedition. Is there anything new in the wind?"

"Nothing."

"I thought, perhaps, that the king's death ——"

"Has only hastened their flight; in ten minutes they will perhaps be here."

"What have you come for, then?"

"To embark with you."

"Ah! ah! the general doubted my fidelity?"

"No, but I wish to have a share in my revenge. Haven't you some one who will relieve me of my horse?"

Groslow whistled and a sailor appeared.

"Patrick," said Groslow, "take this horse to the stables of the nearest inn. If any one asks you whose it is you can say that it belongs to an Irish gentleman."

The sailor departed without reply.

"Now," said Mordaunt, "are you not afraid that they will recognize you?"

"There is no danger, dressed as I am in this pilot coat, on a night as dark as this. Besides, even you didn't recognize me; they will be much less likely to."

"That is true," said Mordaunt; "and they will be far from thinking of you. Everything is ready, is it not?"

"Yes."

"The cargo on board?"

"Yes."

"Five full casks?"

"And fifty empty ones."

"Good."

"We are carrying port wine to Anvers."

"Excellent. Now take me aboard and return to your post, for they will soon be here."

"I am ready."

"It is important that none of your crew should see me."

"I have but one man on board and I am as sure of him as I am of myself. Besides, he doesn't know you; like his mates he is ready to obey our orders knowing nothing of our plan."

"Very well; let us go."

They then went down to the Thames. A boat was fastened to the shore by a chain fixed to a stake. Groslow jumped in, followed by Mordaunt, and in five minutes they were quite away from that world of houses which then crowded the outskirts of London; and Mordaunt could discern the little vessel riding at anchor near the Isle of Dogs. When they reached the side of this felucca, Mordaunt, dexterous in his eagerness for vengeance, seized a rope and climbed up the side of the vessel with a coolness and agility very rare among landmen. He went with Groslow to the captain's berth, a sort of temporary cabin of planks, for the chief apartment had been given up by Captain Rogers to the passengers, who were to be accommodated at the other end of the boat.

"They will have nothing to do, then, at this end?" said Mordaunt.

"Nothing at all."

"That's a capital arrangement. Return to Greenwich and bring them here. I shall hide myself in your cabin. You have a long boat?"

"That in which we came."

"It appeared light and well constructed."

"Quite a canoe."

"Fasten it to the poop with a rope; put the oars into it, so that it may follow in the track and there will be nothing to do except to cut the cord. Put a good supply of rum and biscuit in it for the seamen; should the night happen to be stormy they will not be sorry to find something to console themselves with."

"Consider all this done. Do you wish to see the powder-room?"

"No. When you return I will set the fuse myself, but be careful to conceal your face, so that you can not be recognized by them."

"Never fear."

"There's ten o'clock striking at Greenwich."

Groslow, then, having given the sailor on duty an order to be on the watch with more than usual vigilance, went down into the long boat and soon reached Greenwich. The wind was chilly and the jetty was deserted, as he approached it; but he had no sooner landed than he heard a noise of horses galloping upon the paved road.

These horsemen were our friends, or rather, an *avant garde*, composed of D'Artagnan and Athos. As soon as they arrived at the spot where Groslow stood they stopped, as if guessing that he was the man they wanted. Athos alighted and calmly opened the handkerchief tied at each corner, whilst D'Artagnan, ever cautious, remained on horseback, one hand upon his pistol, leaning forward watchfully.

On seeing the appointed signal, Groslow, who had at first crept behind one of the cannon planted on that spot, walked straight up to the gentlemen. He was so well wrapped up in his cloak that it would have been impossible to see his face even if the night had not been so dark as to render precaution superfluous; nevertheless, the keen glance of Athos perceived at once it was not Rogers who stood before them.

"What do you want with us?" he asked of Groslow.

"I wish to inform you, my lord," replied Groslow, with an Irish accent, feigned of course, "that if you are looking for Captain Rogers you will not find him. He fell down this morning and broke his leg. But I'm his cousin; he told me everything and desired me to watch instead of him, and in his place to conduct, wherever they wished to go, the gentlemen who should bring me a handkerchief tied at each corner, like that one which you hold and one which I have in my pocket."

And he drew out the handkerchief.

"Was that all he said?" inquired Athos.

"No, my lord; he said you had engaged to pay seventy pounds if I landed you safe and sound at Boulogne or any other port you choose in France."

"What do you think of all this?" said Athos, in a low tone to D'Artagnan, after explaining to him in French what the sailor had said in English.

"It seems a likely story to *me*."

"And to me, too."

"Besides, we can but blow out his brains if he proves false," said the Gascon; "and you, Athos, you know something of everything and can be our captain. I daresay you know how to navigate, should he fail us."

"My dear friend, you guess well. My father meant me for the navy and I have some vague notions about navigation."

"You see!" cried D'Artagnan.

They then summoned their friends, who, with Blaisois, Musqueton and Grimaud, promptly joined them, leaving Parry behind them, who was to take back to London the horses of the gentlemen and of their lackeys, which had been sold to the host in settlement of their account with him. Thanks to this stroke of business the four friends were able to take away with them a sum of money which, if not large, was sufficient as a provision against delays and accidents.

Parry parted from his friends regretfully; they had proposed his going with them to France, but he had straightway declined.

"It is very simple," Musqueton had said; "he is thinking of Groslow."

It was Captain Groslow, the reader will remember, who had broken Parry's head.

D'Artagnan resumed immediately the attitude of distrust that was habitual with him. He found the wharf too completely deserted, the night too dark, the captain too accommodating. He had reported to Aramis what had taken place, and Aramis, not less distrustful than he, had increased his suspicions. A slight click of the tongue against his teeth informed Athos of the Gascon's uneasiness.

"We have no time now for suspicions," said Athos. "The boat is waiting for us; come."

"Besides," said Aramis, "what prevents our being distrustful and going aboard at the same time? We can watch the skipper."

"And if he doesn't go straight I will crush him, that's all."

"Well said, Porthos," replied D'Artagnan. "Let us go, then. You first, Musqueton," and he stopped his friends, directing the valets to go first, in order to test the plank leading from the pier to the boat.

The three valets passed without accident. Athos followed them, then Porthos, then Aramis. D'Artagnan went last, still shaking his head.

"What in the devil is the matter with you, my friend?" said Porthos. "Upon my word you would make Cæsar afraid."

"The matter is," replied D'Artagnan, "that I can see upon this pier neither inspector nor sentinel nor exciseman."

"And you complain of that!" said Porthos. "Everything goes as if in flowery paths."

"Everything goes too well, Porthos. But no matter; we must trust in God."

As soon as the plank was withdrawn the captain took his place at the tiller and made a sign to one of the sailors, who, boat-hook in hand, began to push out from the labyrinth of boats in which they were involved. The other sailor had already seated himself on the port side and was ready to row. As soon as there was room for rowing his companion rejoined him and the boat began to move more rapidly.

"At last we are off!" exclaimed Porthos.

"Alas," said Athos, "we depart alone."

"Yes; but all four together and without a scratch; which is a consolation."

"We are not yet at our destination," observed the prudent D'Artagnan; "beware of misadventure."

"Ah, my friend!" cried Porthos, "like the crows, you always bring bad omens. Who could intercept us on such a night as this, pitch dark, when one does not see more than twenty yards before one?"

"Yes, but to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow we shall be at Boulogne."

"I hope so, with all my heart," said the Gascon, "and I confess my weakness. Yes, Athos, you may laugh, but as long as we were within gunshot of the pier or of the vessels lying by it I was looking for a frightful discharge of musketry which would crush us."

"But," said Porthos, with great wisdom, "that was impossible, for they would have killed the captain and the sailors."

"Bah! much Monsieur Mordaunt would care. You don't imagine he would consider a little thing like that?"

"At any rate," said Porthos, "I am glad to hear D'Artagnan admit that he is afraid."

"I not only confess it, but am proud of it," returned the Gascon; "I'm not such a rhinoceros as you are. Oh! what's that?"

"The *Lightning*," answered the captain, "our felucca."

"So far, so good," laughed Athos.

They went on board and the captain instantly conducted them to the berth prepared for them — a cabin which was to serve for all purposes and for the whole party; he then tried to slip away under pretext of giving orders to some one.

"Stop a moment," cried D'Artagnan; "pray how many men have you on board, captain?"

"I don't understand," was the reply.

"Explain it, Athos."

Groslow, on the question being interpreted, answered, "Three, without counting myself."

D'Artagnan understood, for while replying the captain had raised three fingers. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "I begin to be more at my ease; however, whilst you settle yourselves, I shall make the round of the boat."

"As for me," said Porthos, "I will see to the supper."

"A very good idea, Porthos," said the Gascon. "Athos, lend me Grimaud, who in the society of his friend Parry

has perhaps picked up a little English, and can act as my interpreter."

"Go, Grimaud," said Athos.

D'Artagnan, finding a lantern on the deck, took it up, and with a pistol in his hand he said to the captain, in English, "Come" (being, with the classic English oath, the only English words he knew), and so saying he descended to the lower deck.

This was divided into three compartments — one which was covered by the floor of that room in which Athos, Porthos and Aramis were to pass the night; the second was to serve as the sleeping-room for the servants; the third, under the prow of the ship, was under the temporary cabin in which Mordaunt was concealed.

"Oho!" cried D'Artagnan, as he went down the steps of the hatchway, preceded by the lantern; "what a number of barrels! one would think one was in the cave of Ali Baba. What is there in them?" he added, putting his lantern on one of the casks.

The captain seemed inclined to go upon deck again, but controlling himself he answered:

"Port wine."

"Ah! port wine! 'tis a comfort," said the Gascon, "since we shall not die of thirst. Are they all full?"

Grimaud translated the question and Groslow, who was wiping the perspiration from off his forehead, answered:

"Some full, others empty."

D'Artagnan struck the barrels with his hand, and having ascertained that he spoke the truth, pushed his lantern, greatly to the captain's alarm, into the interstices between the barrels, and finding that there was nothing concealed in them:

"Come along," he said; and he went toward the door of the second compartment.

"Stop!" said the Englishman, "I have the key of that door;" and he opened the door, with a trembling hand, into the second compartment, where Musqueton and Blaisois were preparing supper.

Here there was evidently nothing to seek or to apprehend and they passed rapidly to examine the third compartment.

This was the room appropriated to the sailors. Two or three hammocks hung upon the ceiling, a table and two benches composed the entire furniture. D'Artagnan picked up two or three old sails hung on the walls, and meeting nothing to suspect, regained by the hatchway the deck of the vessel.

"And this room?" he asked, pointing to the captain's cabin.

"That's my room," replied Groslow.

"Open the door."

The captain obeyed. D'Artagnan stretched out his arm in which he held the lantern, put his head in at the half opened door, and seeing that the cabin was nothing better than a shed:

"Good," he said. "If there is an army on board it is not here that it is hidden. Let us see what Porthos has found for supper." And thanking the captain, he regained the state cabin, where his friends were.

Porthos had found nothing, and with him fatigue had prevailed over hunger. He had fallen asleep and was in a profound slumber when D'Artagnan returned. Athos and Aramis were beginning to close their eyes, which they half opened when their companion came in again.

"Well!" said Aramis.

"All is well; we may sleep tranquilly."

On this assurance the two friends fell asleep; and D'Artagnan, who was very weary, bade good-night to Grimaud and laid himself down in his cloak, with naked sword at his side, in such a manner that his body barricaded the passage, and it should be impossible to enter the room without upsetting him.

CHAPTER LXXI.

PORT WINE.

IN ten minutes the masters slept; not so the servants—hungry, and more thirsty than hungry.

Blaisois and Musqueton set themselves to preparing their bed, which consisted of a plank and a valise. On a hanging table, which swung to and fro with the rolling of the vessel, were a pot of beer and three glasses.

"This cursed rolling!" said Blaisois. "I know it will serve me as it did when we came over."

"And to think," said Musqueton, "that we have nothing to fight seasickness with but barley bread and hop beer. Pah!"

"But where is your wicker flask, Monsieur Musqueton? Have you lost it?" asked Blaisois.

"No," replied Musqueton, "Parry kept it. Those devilish Scotchmen are always thirsty. And you, Grimaud," he said to his companion, who had just come in after his round with D'Artagnan, "are you thirsty?"

"As thirsty as a Scotchman!" was Grimaud's laconic reply.

And he sat down and began to cast up the accounts of his party, whose money he managed.

"Oh, lackadaisy! I'm beginning to feel queer!" cried Blaisois.

"If that's the case," said Musqueton, with a learned air, "take some nourishment."

"Do you call that nourishment?" said Blaisois, pointing to the barley bread and pot of beer upon the table.

"Blaisois," replied Musqueton, "remember that bread is

the true nourishment of a Frenchman, who is not always able to get bread; ask Grimaud."

"Yes, but beer?" asked Blaisois sharply, "is that their true drink?"

"As to that," answered Musqueton, puzzled how to get out of the difficulty, "I must confess that to me beer is as disagreeable as wine is to the English."

"What! Monsieur Musqueton! The English—do they dislike wine?"

"They hate it."

"But I have seen them drink it."

"As a punishment. For example, an English prince died one day because they had put him into a butt of Malmsey. I heard the Chevalier d'Herblay say so."

"The fool!" cried Blaisois. "I wish I had been in his place."

"Thou canst be," said Grimaud, writing down his figures.

"How?" asked Blaisois, "I can? Explain yourself."

Grimaud went on with his sum and cast up the whole.

"Port," he said, extending his hand in the direction of the first compartment examined by D'Artagnan and himself.

"Eh? eh? ah? Those barrels I saw through the door?"

"Port!" replied Grimaud, beginning a fresh sum.

"I have heard," said Blaisois, "that port is a very good wine."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Musqueton, smacking his lips.

"Excellent; there is port wine in the cellar of Monsieur le Baron de Bracieux."

"Suppose we ask these Englishmen to sell us a bottle," said the honest Blaisois.

"Sell!" cried Musqueton, about whom there was a remnant of his ancient marauding character left. "One may well perceive, young man, that you are inexperienced. Why buy what one can take?"

"Take!" said Blaisois; "covet the goods of your neighbor? That is forbidden, it seems to me."

"Where forbidden?" asked Musqueton.

"In the commandments of God, or of the church, I don't know which. I only know it says, 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods, nor yet his wife.'"

"That is a child's reason, Monsieur Blaisois," said Musqueton in his most patronizing manner. "Yes, you talk like a child — I repeat the word. Where have you read in the Scriptures, I ask you, that the English are your neighbors?"

"Nowhere, that is true," said Blaisois; "at least, I can't now recall it."

"A child's reason — I repeat it," continued Musqueton. "If you had been ten years engaged in war, as Grimaud and I have been, my dear Blaisois, you would know the difference there is between the goods of others and the goods of enemies. Now an Englishman is an enemy; this port wine belongs to the English, therefore it belongs to us."

"And our masters?" asked Blaisois, stupefied by this harangue, delivered with an air of profound sagacity, "will they be of your opinion?"

Musqueton smiled disdainfully.

"I suppose that you think it necessary that I should disturb the repose of these illustrious lords to say, 'Gentlemen, your servant, Musqueton, is thirsty.' What does Monsieur Bracieux care, think you, whether I am thirsty or not?"

"'Tis a very expensive wine," said Blaisois, shaking his head.

"Were it liquid gold, Monsieur Blaisois, our masters would not deny themselves this wine. Know that Monsieur de Bracieux is rich enough to drink a tun of port wine, even if obliged to pay a pistole for every drop." His manner became more and more lofty every instant; then he arose and after finishing off the beer at one draught he advanced majestically to the door of the compartment where the wine was. "Ah! locked!" he exclaimed; "these devils of English, how suspicious they are!"

"Locked!" said Blaisois; "ah! the deuce it is; unlucky, for my stomach is getting more and more upset."

"Locked!" repeated Musqueton.

"But," Blaisois ventured to say, "I have heard you relate, Monsieur Musqueton, that once on a time, at Chantilly, you fed your master and yourself by taking partridges in a snare, carp with a line, and bottles with a slipnoose."

"Perfectly true; but there was an airhole in the cellar and the wine was in bottles. I cannot throw the loop through this partition nor move with a pack-thread a cask of wine which may perhaps weigh two hundred pounds."

"No, but you can take out two or three boards of the partition," answered Blaisois, "and make a hole in the cask with a gimlet."

Musqueton opened his great round eyes to the utmost, astonished to find in Blaisois qualities for which he did not give him credit.

"'Tis true," he said; "but where can I get a chisel to take the planks out, a gimlet to pierce the cask?"

"Trousers," said Grimaud, still squaring his accounts.

"Ah, yes!" said Musqueton.

Grimaud, in fact, was not only the accountant, but the armorer of the party; and as he was a man full of forethought, these trousers, carefully rolled up in his valise, contained every sort of tool for immediate use.

Musqueton, therefore, was soon provided with tools and he began his task. In a few minutes he had extracted three boards. He tried to pass his body through the aperture, but not being like the frog in the fable, who thought he was larger than he really was, he found he must take out three or four more before he could get through.

He sighed and set to work again.

Grimaud had now finished his accounts. He arose and stood near Musqueton.

"I," he said.

"What?" said Musqueton.

"I can pass."

"That is true," said Musqueton, glancing at his friend's long and thin body, "you will pass easily."

"And he knows the full casks," said Blaisois, "for he has already been in the hold with Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan. Let Monsieur Grimaud go in, Monsieur Mouston."

"I could go in as well as Grimaud," said Musqueton, a little piqued.

"Yes, but that would take too much time and I am thirsty. I am getting more and more seasick."

"Go in, then, Grimaud," said Musqueton, handing him the beer pot and gimlet.

"Rinse the glasses," said Grimaud. Then with a friendly gesture toward Musqueton, that he might forgive him for finishing an enterprise so brilliantly begun by another, he glided like a serpent through the opening and disappeared.

Blaisois was in a state of great excitement; he was in ecstasies. Of all the exploits performed since their arrival in England by the extraordinary men with whom he had the honor to be associated, this seemed without question to be the most wonderful.

"You are about to see," said Musqueton, looking at Blaisois with an expression of superiority which the latter did not even think of questioning, "you are about to see, Blaisois, how we old soldiers drink when we are thirsty."

"My cloak," said Grimaud, from the bottom of the hold.

"What do you want?" asked Blaisois.

"My cloak — stop up the aperture with it."

"Why?" asked Blaisois.

"Simpleton!" exclaimed Musqueton; "suppose any one came into the room."

"Ah, true," cried Blaisois, with evident admiration; "but it will be dark in the cellar."

"Grimaud always sees, dark or light, night as well as day," answered Musqueton.

"That is lucky," said Blaisois. "As for me, when I have no candle I can't take two steps without knocking against something."

"That's because you haven't served," said Musqueton. "Had you been in the army you would have been able to

pick up a needle on the floor of a closed oven. But hark! I think some one is coming."

Musqueton made, with a low whistling sound, the sign of alarm well known to the lackeys in the days of their youth, resumed his place at the table and made a sign to Blaisois to follow his example.

Blaisois obeyed.

The door of their cabin was opened. Two men, wrapped in their cloaks, appeared.

"Oho!" said they, "not in bed at a quarter past eleven. That's against all rules. In a quarter of an hour let every one be in bed and snoring."

These two men then went toward the compartment in which Grimaud was secreted; opened the door, entered and shut it after them.

"Ah!" cried Blaisois, "he is lost!"

"Grimaud's a cunning fellow," murmured Musqueton.

They waited for ten minutes, during which time no noise was heard that might indicate that Grimaud was discovered and at the expiration of that anxious interval the two men returned, closed the door after them, and repeating their orders that the servants should go to bed and extinguish their lights, disappeared.

"Shall we obey?" asked Blaisois. "All this looks suspicious."

"They said a quarter of an hour. We still have five minutes," replied Musqueton.

"Suppose we warn the masters."

"Let's wait for Grimaud."

"But perhaps they have killed him."

"Grimaud would have cried out."

"You know he is almost dumb."

"We should have heard the blow, then."

"But if he doesn't return?"

"Here he is."

At that very moment Grimaud drew back the cloak which hid the aperture and came in with his face livid, his eyes

staring wide open with terror, so that the pupils were contracted almost to nothing, with a large circle of white around them. He held in his hand a tankard full of a dark substance, and approaching the gleam of light shed by the lamp he uttered this single monosyllable: "Oh!" with such an expression of extreme terror that Musqueton started, alarmed, and Blaisois was near fainting from fright.

Both, however, cast an inquisitive glance into the tankard—it was full of gunpowder.

Convinced that the ship was full of powder instead of having a cargo of wine, Grimaud hastened to awake D'Artagnan, who had no sooner beheld him than he perceived that something extraordinary had taken place. Imposing silence, Grimaud put out the little night lamp, then knelt down and poured into the lieutenant's ear a recital melodramatic enough not to require play of feature to give it pith.

This was the gist of his strange story:

The first barrel that Grimaud had found on passing into the compartment he struck—it was empty. He passed on to another—it, also, was empty; but the third which he tried was, from the dull sound it gave out, evidently full. At this point Grimaud stopped and was preparing to make a hole with his gimlet, when he found a spigot; he therefore placed his tankard under it and turned the spout; something, whatever it was the cask contained, fell silently into the tankard.

Whilst he was thinking that he should first taste the liquor which the tankard contained before taking it to his companions, the door of the cellar opened and a man with a lantern in his hands and enveloped in a cloak, came and stood just before the hogshead, behind which Grimaud, on hearing him come in, instantly crept. This was Groslow. He was accompanied by another man, who carried in his hand something long and flexible, rolled up, resembling a washing line. His face was hidden under the wide brim of his hat. Grimaud, thinking that they had come, as he had, to try the port wine, effaced himself behind his cask and

consoled himself with the reflection that if he were discovered the crime was not a great one.

"Have you the wick?" asked the one who carried the lantern.

"Here it is," answered the other.

At the voice of this last speaker, Grimaud started and felt a shudder creeping through his very marrow. He rose gently, so that his head was just above the round of the barrel, and under the large hat he recognized the pale face of Mordaunt.

"How long will this fuse burn?" asked this person.

"About five minutes," replied the captain.

That voice also was known to Grimaud. He looked from one to the other and after Mordaunt he recognized Groslow.

"Then tell the men to be in readiness—don't tell them why now. When the clock strikes a quarter after midnight collect your men. Get down into the long boat."

"That is, when I have lighted the match?"

"I will undertake that. I wish to be sure of my revenge. Are the oars in the boat?"

"Everything is ready."

"'Tis well."

Mordaunt knelt down and fastened one end of the train to the spigot, in order that he might have nothing to do but to set it on fire at the opposite end with the match.

He then arose.

"You hear me—at a quarter past midnight—in fact, in twenty minutes."

"I understand all perfectly, sir," replied Groslow; "but allow me to say there is great danger in what you undertake; would it not be better to intrust one of the men to set fire to the train?"

"My dear Groslow," answered Mordaunt, "you know the French proverb, 'Nothing one does not do one's self is ever well done.' I shall abide by that rule."

Grimaud had heard all this, if he had not understood it. But what he saw made good what he lacked in perfect

comprehension of the language. He had seen the two mortal enemies of the musketeers, had seen Mordaunt adjust the fuse; he had heard the proverb, which Mordaunt had given in French. Then he felt and felt again the contents of the tankard he held in his hand; and, instead of the lively liquor expected by Blaisois and Musqueton, he found beneath his fingers the grains of some coarse powder.

Mordaunt went away with the captain. At the door he stopped to listen.

"Do you hear how they sleep?" he asked.

In fact, Porthos could be heard snoring through the partition.

"'Tis God who gives them into our hands," answered Groslow.

"This time the devil himself shall not save them," rejoined Mordaunt.

And they went out together.

CHAPTER LXXII.

END OF THE PORT WINE MYSTERY.

GRIMAUD waited till he heard the bolt grind in the lock, and when he was satisfied that he was alone he slowly rose from his recumbent posture.

"Ah!" he said, wiping with his sleeve large drops of sweat from his forehead, "how lucky it was that Musqueton was thirsty!"

He made haste to pass out by the opening, still thinking himself in a dream; but the sight of the gunpowder in the tankard proved to him that his dream was a fatal nightmare.

It may be imagined that D'Artagnan listened to these details with increasing interest; before Grimaud had finished he rose without noise and putting his mouth to Aramis's ear, and at the same time touching him on the shoulder to prevent a sudden movement:

"Chevalier," he said, "get up and don't make the least noise."

Aramis awoke. D'Artagnan, pressing his hand, repeated his call. Aramis obeyed.

"Athos is near you," said D'Artagnan; "warn him as I have warned you."

Aramis easily aroused Athos, whose sleep was light, like that of all persons of a finely organized constitution. But there was more difficulty in arousing Porthos. He was beginning to ask full explanation of that breaking in on his sleep, which was very annoying to him, when D'Artagnan, instead of explaining, closed his mouth with his hand.

Then our Gascon, extending his arms, drew to him the

heads of his three friends till they almost touched one another.

"Friends," he said, "we must leave this craft at once or we are dead men."

"Bah!" said Athos, "are you still afraid?"

"Do you know who is captain of this vessel?"

"No."

"Captain Groslow."

The shudder of the three musketeers showed to D'Artagnan that his words began to make some impression on them.

"Groslow!" said Aramis; "the devil!"

"Who is this Groslow?" asked Porthos. "I don't remember him."

"Groslow is the man who broke Parry's head and is now getting ready to break ours."

"Oh! oh!"

"And do you know who is his lieutenant?"

"His lieutenant? There is none," said Athos. "They don't have lieutenants in a felucca manned by a crew of four."

"Yes, but Monsieur Groslow is not a captain of the ordinary kind; he has a lieutenant, and that lieutenant is Monsieur Mordaunt."

This time the musketeers did more than shudder—they almost cried out. Those invincible men were subject to a mysterious and fatal influence which that name had over them; the mere sound of it filled them with terror.

"What shall we do?" said Athos.

"We must seize the felucca," said Aramis.

"And kill him," said Porthos.

"The felucca is mined," said D'Artagnan. "Those casks which I took for casks of port wine are filled with powder. When Mordaunt finds himself discovered he will destroy all, friends and foes; and on my word he would be bad company in going either to Heaven or to hell."

"You have some plan, then?" asked Athos.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Have you confidence in me?"

"Give your orders," said the three musketeers.

"Very well; come this way."

D'Artagnan went toward a very small, low window, just large enough to let a man through. He turned it gently on its hinges.

"There," he said, "is our road."

"The deuce! it is a very cold one, my dear friend," said Aramis.

"Stay here, if you like, but I warn you 'twill be rather too warm presently."

"But we cannot swim to the shore."

"The long boat is yonder, lashed to the felucca. We will take possession of it and cut the cable. Come, my friends."

"A moment's delay," said Athos; "our servants?"

"Here we are!" they cried.

Meantime the three friends were standing motionless before the awful sight which D'Artagnan, in raising the shutters, had disclosed to them through the narrow opening of the window.

Those who have once beheld such a spectacle know that there is nothing more solemn, more striking than the raging sea, rolling, with its deafening roar, its dark billows beneath the pale light of a wintry moon.

"Gracious Heaven, we are hesitating!" cried D'Artagnan; "if we hesitate what will the servants do?"

"I do not hesitate, you know," said Grimaud.

"Sir," interposed Blaisois, "I warn you that I can only swim in rivers."

"And I not at all," said Musqueton.

But D'Artagnan had now slipped through the window.

"You have decided, friend?" said Athos.

"Yes," the Gascon answered; "Athos! you, who are a perfect being, bid spirit triumph over body. Do you, Aramis, order the servants. Porthos, kill every one who stands in your way."

And after pressing the hand of Athos D'Artagnan chose a moment when the ship rolled backward, so that he had only to plunge into the water, which was already up to his waist.

Athos followed him before the felucca rose again on the waves; the cable which tied the boat to the vessel was then seen plainly rising out of the sea.

D'Artagnan swam to it and held it, suspending himself by this rope, his head alone out of water.

In one second Athos joined him.

Then they saw, as the felucca turned, two other heads peeping, those of Aramis and Grimaud.

"I am uneasy about Blaisois," said Athos; "he can, he says, only swim in rivers."

"When people can swim at all they can swim anywhere. To the boat! to the boat!"

"But Porthos, I do not see him."

"Porthos is coming — he swims like Leviathan."

In fact, Porthos did not appear; for a scene, half tragedy and half comedy, had been performed by him with Musqueton and Blaisois, who, frightened by the noise of the sea, by the whistling of the wind, by the sight of that dark water yawning like a gulf beneath them, shrank back instead of going forward.

"Come, come!" said Porthos; "jump in."

"But, monsieur," said Musqueton, "I can't swim; let me stay here."

"And me, too, monsieur," said Blaisois.

"I assure you, I shall be very much in the way in that little boat," said Musqueton.

"And I know I shall drown before reaching it," continued Blaisois.

"Come along! I shall strangle you both if you don't get out," said Porthos at last, seizing Musqueton by the throat. "Forward, Blaisois!"

A groan, stifled by the grasp of Porthos, was all the reply of poor Blaisois, for the giant, taking him neck and heels,

plunged him into the water headforemost, pushing him out of the window as if he had been a plank.

"Now, Musqueton," he said, "I hope you don't mean to desert your master?"

"Ah, sir," replied Musqueton, his eyes filling with tears, "why did you re-enter the army? We were all so happy in the Château de Pierrefonds!"

And without any other complaint, passive and obedient, either from true devotion to his master or from the example set by Blaisois, Musqueton leaped into the sea headforemost. A sublime action, at all events, for Musqueton looked upon himself as dead. But Porthos was not a man to abandon an old servant, and when Musqueton rose above the water, blind as a new-born puppy, he found he was supported by the large hand of Porthos and that he was thus enabled, without having occasion even to move, to advance toward the cable with the dignity of a very triton.

In a few minutes Porthos had rejoined his companions, who were already in the boat; but when, after they had all got in, it came to his turn, there was great danger that in putting his huge leg over the edge of the boat he would upset the little vessel. Athos was the last to enter.

"Are you all here?" he asked.

"Ah! have you your sword, Athos?" cried D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Cut the cable, then."

Athos drew a sharp poniard from his belt and cut the cord. The felucca went on; the boat continued stationary, rocked only by the swashing waves.

"Come, Athos!" said D'Artagnan, giving his hand to the count; "you are going to see something curious," added the Gascon.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

FATALITY.

SCARCELY had D'Artagnan uttered these words when a ringing and sudden noise was heard resounding through the felucca, which had now become dim in the obscurity of the night.

"That, you may be sure," said the Gascon, "means something."

They then at the same instant perceived a large lantern carried on a pole appear on the deck, defining the forms of shadows behind it.

Suddenly a terrible cry, a cry of despair, was wafted through space; and as if the shrieks of anguish had driven away the clouds, the veil which hid the moon was cleared away and the gray sails and dark shrouds of the felucca were plainly visible beneath the silvery light.

Shadows ran, as if bewildered, to and fro on the vessel and mournful cries accompanied these delirious walkers. In the midst of these screams they saw Mordaunt upon the poop, with a torch in hand.

The agitated figures, apparently wild with terror, consisted of Groslow, who at the hour fixed by Mordaunt had collected his men and the sailors. Mordaunt, after having listened at the door of the cabin to hear if the musketeers were still asleep, had gone down into the cellar, convinced by their silence that they were all in a deep slumber. Then he had run to the train, impetuous as a man who is excited by revenge, and full of confidence, as are those whom God blinds, he had set fire to the wick of nitre.

All this while Groslow and his men were assembled on deck.

"Haul up the cable and draw the boat to us," said Groslow.

One of the sailors got down the side of the ship, seized the cable, and drew it; it came without the least resistance.

"The cable is cut!" he cried; "no boat!"

"How! no boat!" exclaimed Groslow; "it is impossible."

"'Tis true, however," answered the sailor; "there's nothing in the wake of the ship; besides, here's the end of the cable."

"What's the matter?" cried Mordaunt, who, coming up out of the hatchway, rushed to the stern, waving his torch.

"Only that our enemies have escaped; they have cut the cord and gone off with the boat."

Mordaunt bounded with one step to the cabin and kicked open the door.

"Empty!" he exclaimed; "the infernal demons!"

"We must pursue them," said Groslow; "they can't be gone far, and we will sink them, passing over them."

"Yes, but the fire," ejaculated Mordaunt; "I have lighted it."

"Ten thousand devils!" cried Groslow, rushing to the hatchway; "perhaps there is still time to save us."

Mordaunt answered only by a terrible laugh, threw his torch into the sea and plunged in after it. The instant Groslow put his foot upon the hatchway steps the ship opened like the crater of a volcano. A burst of flame rose toward the skies with an explosion like that of a hundred cannon; the air burned, ignited by flaming embers, then the frightful lightning disappeared, the brands sank, one after another, into the abyss, where they were extinguished, and save for a slight vibration in the air, after a few minutes had elapsed one would have thought that nothing had happened.

Only — the felucca had disappeared from the surface of the sea and Groslow and his three sailors were consumed.

The four friends saw all this — not a single detail of this

fearful scene escaped them. At one moment bathed as they were in a flood of brilliant light, which illumined the sea for the space of a league, they might each be seen, each by his own peculiar attitude and manner expressing the awe which, even in their hearts of bronze, they could not help experiencing. Soon a torrent of vivid sparks fell around them — then, at last, the volcano was extinguished — then all was dark and still — the floating bark and heaving ocean.

They sat silent and dejected.

“By Heaven!” at last said Athos, the first to speak, “by this time, I think, all must be over.”

“Here, my lords! save me! help!” cried a voice, whose mournful accents, reaching the four friends, seemed to proceed from some phantom of the ocean.

All looked around; Athos himself started.

“’Tis he! it is his voice!”

All still remained silent, the eyes of all were turned in the direction where the vessel had disappeared, endeavoring in vain to penetrate the darkness. After a minute or two they were able to distinguish a man, who approached them, swimming vigorously.

Athos extended his arm toward him, pointing him out to his companions.

“Yes, yes, I see him well enough,” said D’Artagnan.

“He — again!” cried Porthos, who was breathing like a blacksmith’s bellows; “why, he is made of iron.”

“Oh, my God!” muttered Athos.

Aramis and D’Artagnan whispered to each other.

Mordaunt made several strokes more, and raising his arm in sign of distress above the waves: “Pity, pity on me, gentlemen, in Heaven’s name! my strength is failing me; I am dying.”

The voice that implored aid was so piteous that it awakened pity in the heart of Athos.

“Poor fellow!” he exclaimed.

“Indeed!” said D’Artagnan, “monsters have only to complain to gain your sympathy. I believe he’s swimming

toward us. Does he think we are going to take him in? Row, Porthos, row." And setting the example he plowed his oar into the sea; two strokes took the bark on twenty fathoms further.

"Oh! you will not abandon me! You will not leave me to perish! You will not be pitiless!" cried Mordaunt.

"Ah! ah!" said Porthos to Mordaunt, "I think we have you now, my hero! and there are no doors by which you can escape this time but those of hell."

"Oh! Porthos!" murmured the Comte de la Fère.

"Oh, pray, for mercy's sake, don't fly from me. For pity's sake!" cried the young man, whose agony-drawn breath at times, when his head went under water, under the wave, exhaled and made the icy waters bubble.

D'Artagnan, however, who had consulted with Aramis, spoke to the poor wretch. "Go away," he said; "your repentance is too recent to inspire confidence. See! the vessel in which you wished to fry us is still smoking; and the situation in which you are is a bed of roses compared to that in which you wished to place us and in which you have placed Monsieur Groslow and his companions."

"Sir!" replied Mordaunt, in a tone of deep despair, "my penitence is sincere. Gentlemen, I am young, scarcely twenty-three years old. I was drawn on by a very natural resentment to avenge my mother. You would have done what I did."

Mordaunt wanted now only two or three fathoms to reach the boat, for the approach of death seemed to give him supernatural strength.

"Alas!" he said, "I am then to die? You are going to kill the son, as you killed the mother! Surely, if I am culpable and if I ask for pardon, I ought to be forgiven."

Then, as if his strength failed him, he seemed unable to sustain himself above the water and a wave passed over his head, which drowned his voice.

"Oh! this is torture to me!" cried Athos.

Mordaunt reappeared.

"For my part," said D'Artagnan, "I say this must come to an end; murderer, as you were, of your uncle! executioner, as you were, of King Charles! incendiary! I recommend you to sink forthwith to the bottom of the sea; and if you come another fathom nearer, I'll stave your wicked head in with this oar."

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" cried Athos, "my son, I entreat you; the wretch is dying, and it is horrible to let a man die without extending a hand to save him. I cannot resist doing so; he must live."

"Zounds!" replied D'Artagnan, "why don't you give yourself up directly, feet and hands bound, to that wretch? Ah! Comte de la Fère, you wish to perish by his hands! I, your son, as you call me — I will not let you!"

'Twas the first time D'Artagnan had ever refused a request from Athos.

Aramis calmly drew his sword, which he had carried between his teeth as he swam.

"If he lays his hand on the boat's edge I will cut it off, regicide that he is."

"And I," said Porthos. "Wait."

"What are you going to do?" asked Aramis.

"Throw myself in the water and strangle him."

"Oh, gentlemen!" cried Athos, "be men! be Christians! See! death is depicted on his face! Ah! do not bring on me the horrors of remorse! Grant me this poor wretch's life. I will bless you — I —"

"I am dying!" cried Mordaunt, "come to me! come to me!"

D'Artagnan began to be touched. The boat at this moment turned around, and the dying man was by that turn brought nearer Athos.

"Monsieur the Comte de la Fère," he cried, "I supplicate you! pity me! I call on you — where are you? I see you no longer — I am dying — help me! help me!"

"Here I am, sir!" said Athos, leaning and stretching out his arm to Mordaunt with that air of dignity and nobility

of soul habitual to him; "here I am, take my hand and jump into our boat."

Mordaunt made a last effort — rose — seized the hand thus extended to him and grasped it with the vehemence of despair.

"That's right," said Athos; "put your other hand here." And he offered him his shoulder as another stay and support, so that his head almost touched that of Mordaunt; and these two mortal enemies were in as close an embrace as if they had been brothers.

"Now, sir," said the count, "you are safe — calm yourself."

"Ah! my mother," cried Mordaunt, with eyes on fire with a look of hate impossible to paint, "I can only offer thee one victim, but it shall at any rate be the one thou wouldst thyself have chosen!"

And whilst D'Artagnan uttered a cry, Porthos raised the oar and Aramis sought a place to strike, a frightful shake given to the boat precipitated Athos into the sea; whilst Mordaunt, with a shout of triumph, grasped the neck of his victim and in order to paralyze his movements, twined arms and legs around the musketeer. For an instant, without an exclamation, without a cry for help, Athos tried to sustain himself on the surface of the waters, but the weight dragged him down; he disappeared by degrees; soon nothing was to be seen except his long, floating hair; then both men disappeared and the bubbling of the water, which, in its turn, was soon effaced, alone indicated the spot where these two had sunk.

Mute with horror, the three friends had remained open-mouthed, their eyes dilated, their arms extended like statues and, motionless as they were, the beating of their hearts was audible. Porthos was the first who came to himself. He tore his hair.

"Oh!" he cried, "Athos! Athos! thou man of noble heart; woe is me! I have let thee perish!"

At this instant, in the midst of the silver circle illumined

by the light of the moon the same whirlpool which had been made by the sinking men was again obvious, and first were seen, rising above the waves, a wisp of hair, then a pale face with open eyes, yet, nevertheless, the eyes of death; then a body, which, after rising of itself even to the waist above the sea, turned gently on its back, according to the caprice of the waves, and floated.

In the bosom of this corpse was plunged a poniard, the gold hilt of which shone in the moonbeams.

"Mordaunt! Mordaunt!" cried the three friends; "'tis Mordaunt!"

"But Athos!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

Suddenly the boat leaned on one side beneath a new and unexpected weight and Grimaud uttered a shout of joy; every one turned around and beheld Athos, livid, his eyes dim and his hands trembling, supporting himself on the edge of the boat. Eight vigorous arms lifted him up immediately and laid him in the boat, where directly Athos was warmed and reanimated, reviving with the caresses and cares of his friends, who were intoxicated with joy.

"You are not hurt?" asked D'Artagnan.

"No," replied Athos; "and he ——"

"Oh, he! now we may say at last, thank Heaven! he is really dead. Look!" and D'Artagnan, obliging Athos to look in the direction he pointed, showed him the body of Mordaunt floating on its back, which, sometimes submerged, sometimes rising, seemed still to pursue the four friends with looks of insult and mortal hatred.

At last he sank. Athos had followed him with a glance in which the deepest melancholy and pity were expressed.

"Bravo, Athos!" cried Aramis, with an emotion very rare in him.

"A capital blow you gave!" cried Porthos.

"I have a *son*. I wished to live," said Athos.

"In short," said D'Artagnan, "this has been the will of God."

"It was not I who killed him," said Athos in a soft, low tone, "'twas destiny."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

HOW MUSQUETON, AFTER BEING VERY NEARLY ROASTED,
HAD A NARROW ESCAPE OF BEING EATEN.

A DEEP silence reigned for a long time in the boat after the fearful scene described.

The moon, which had shone for a short time, disappeared behind the clouds; every object was again plunged in the obscurity that is so awful in the deserts and still more so in that liquid desert, the ocean, and nothing was heard save the whistling of the west wind driving along the tops of the crested billows.

Porthos was the first to speak.

"I have seen," he said, "many dreadful things, but nothing that ever agitated me so much as what I have just witnessed. Nevertheless, even in my present state of perturbation, I protest that I feel happy. I have a hundred pounds' weight less upon my chest. I breathe more freely." In fact, Porthos breathed so loud as to do credit to the free play of his powerful lungs.

"For my part," observed Aramis, "I cannot say the same as you do, Porthos. I am still terrified to such a degree that I scarcely believe my eyes. I look around the boat, expecting every moment to see that poor wretch holding between his hands the poniard plunged into his heart."

"Oh! I feel easy," replied Porthos. "The poniard was pointed at the sixth rib and buried up to the hilt in his body. I do not reproach you, Athos, for what you have done. On the contrary, when one aims a blow, that is the regulation way to strike. So now, I breathe again — I am happy!"

"Don't be in haste to celebrate a victory, Porthos," inter-

posed D'Artagnan; "never have we incurred a greater danger than we are now encountering. Men may subdue men—they cannot overcome the elements. We are now on the sea, at night, without any pilot, in a frail bark; should a blast of wind upset the boat we are lost."

Musqueton heaved a deep sigh.

"You are ungrateful, D'Artagnan," said Athos; "yes, ungrateful to Providence, to whom we owe our safety in the most miraculous manner. Let us sail before the wind, and unless it changes we shall be drifted either to Calais or Boulogne. Should our bark be upset we are five of us good swimmers, able enough to turn it over again, or if not, to hold on by it. Now we are on the very road which all the vessels between Dover and Calais take, 'tis impossible but that we should meet with a fisherman who will pick us up."

"But should we not find any fisherman and should the wind shift to the north?"

"That," said Athos, "would be quite another thing; and we should nevermore see land until we were upon the other side of the Atlantic."

"Which implies that we may die of hunger," said Aramis.

"'Tis more than possible," answered the Comte de la Fère. Musqueton sighed again, more deeply than before.

"What is the matter? what ails you?" asked Porthos.

"I am cold, sir," said Musqueton.

"Impossible! your body is covered with a coating of fat which preserves it from the cold air."

"Ah! sir, 'tis this very coating of fat that makes me shiver."

"How is that, Musqueton?"

"Alas! your honor, in the library of the Château of Bracieux there are a lot of books of travels."

"What then?"

"Amongst them the voyages of Jean Mocquet in the time of Henry IV."

"Well?"

"In these books, your honor, 'tis told how hungry voy-

agers, drifting out to sea, have a bad habit of eating each other and beginning with —— ”

“The fattest among them !” cried D’Artagnan, unable in spite of the gravity of the occasion to help laughing.

“Yes, sir,” answered Musqueton ; “but permit me to say I see nothing laughable in it. However,” he added, turning to Porthos, “I should not regret dying, sir, were I sure that by doing so I might still be useful to you.”

“Mouston,” replied Porthos, much affected, “should we ever see my castle of Pierrefonds again you shall have as your own and for your descendants the vineyard that surrounds the farm.”

“And you should call it ‘Devotion,’” added Aramis ; “the vineyard of self-sacrifice, to transmit to latest ages the recollection of your devotion to your master.”

“Chevalier,” said D’Artagnan, laughing, “you could eat a piece of Mouston, couldn’t you, especially after two or three days of fasting ?”

“Oh, no,” replied Aramis, “I should much prefer Blaisois ; we haven’t known him so long.”

One may readily conceive that during these jokes, which were intended chiefly to divert Athos from the scene which had just taken place, the servants, with the exception of Grimaud, were not silent. Suddenly Musqueton uttered a cry of delight, taking from beneath one of the benches a bottle of wine ; and on looking more closely in the same place he discovered a dozen similar bottles, bread, and a monster junk of salted beef.

“Oh, sir !” he cried, passing the bottle to Porthos, “we are saved — the bark is supplied with provisions.”

This intelligence restored every one save Athos to gayety.

“Zounds !” exclaimed Porthos, “’tis astonishing how empty violent agitation makes the stomach.”

And he drank off half a bottle at a draught and bit great mouthfuls of the bread and meat.

“Now,” said Athos, “sleep, or try to sleep, my friends, and I will watch.”

In a few moments, notwithstanding their wet clothes, the icy blast that blew and the previous scene of terror, these hardy adventurers, with their iron frames, inured to every hardship, threw themselves down, intending to profit by the advice of Athos, who sat at the helm, pensively wakeful, guiding the little bark the way it was to go, his eyes fixed on the heavens, as if he sought to verify not only the road to France, but the benign aspect of protecting Providence. After some hours of repose the sleepers were aroused by Athos.

Dawn was shedding its pallid, placid glimmer on the purple ocean, when at the distance of a musket shot from them was seen a dark gray mass, above which gleamed a triangular sail; then masters and servants joined in a fervent cry to the crew of that vessel to hear them and to save.

"A bark!" all cried together.

"It was, in fact, a small craft from Dunkirk bound for Boulogne.

A quarter of an hour afterward the rowboat of this craft took them all aboard. Grimaud tendered twenty guineas to the captain, and at nine o'clock in the morning, having a fair wind, our Frenchmen set foot on their native land.

"Egad! how strong one feels here!" said Porthos, almost burying his large feet in the sands. "Zounds! I could defy a nation!"

"Be quiet, Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "we are observed."

"We are admired, i'faith," answered Porthos.

"These people who are looking at us are only merchants," said Athos, "and are looking more at the cargo than at us."

"I shall not trust to that," said the lieutenant, "and I shall make for the Dunes* as soon as possible."

The party followed him and soon disappeared with him behind the hillocks of sand unobserved. Here, after a short conference, they proposed to separate.

"And why separate?" asked Athos.

"Because," answered the Gascon, "we were sent, Porthos

* Sandy hills about Dunkirk, from which it derives its name.

and I, by Cardinal Mazarin to fight for Cromwell; instead of fighting for Cromwell we have served Charles I. — not the same thing, by any means. In returning with the Comte de la Fère and Monsieur d'Herblay our crime would be confirmed. We have circumvented Cromwell, Mordaunt, and the sea, but we shall find a certain difficulty in circumventing Mazarin."

"You forget," replied Athos, "that we consider ourselves your prisoners and not free from the engagement we entered into."

"Truly, Athos," interrupted D'Artagnan, "I am vexed that such a man as you are should talk nonsense which schoolboys would be ashamed of. Chevalier," he continued, addressing Aramis, who, leaning proudly on his sword, seemed to agree with his companion, "Chevalier, Porthos and I run no risk; besides, should any ill-luck happen to two of us, will it not be much better that the other two should be spared to assist those who may be apprehended? Besides, who knows whether, divided, we may not obtain a pardon—you from the queen, we from Mazarin—which, were we all four together, would never be granted. Come, Athos and Aramis, go to the right; Porthos, come with me to the left; these gentlemen should file off into Normandy, whilst we, by the nearest road, reach Paris."

He then gave his friends minute directions as to their route.

"Ah! my dear friend," exclaimed Athos, "how I should admire the resources of your mind did I not stop to adore those of your heart."

And he gave him his hand.

"Isn't this fox a genius, Athos?" asked the Gascon. "No! he knows how to crunch fowls, to dodge the huntsman and to find his way home by day or by night, that's all. Well, is all said?"

"All."

"Then let's count our money and divide it. Ah! hurrah! there's the sun! A merry morning to you, Sunshine. 'Tis a long time since I saw thee!"

"Come, come, D'Artagnan," said Athos, "do not affect to be strong-minded; there are tears in your eyes. Let us be open with each other and sincere."

"What!" cried the Gascon, "Do you think, Athos, we can take leave, calmly, of two friends at a time not free from danger to you and Aramis?"

"No," answered Athos; "embrace me, my son."

"Zounds!" said Porthos, sobbing, "I believe I'm crying; but how foolish all this is!"

Then they embraced. At that moment their fraternal bond of union was closer than ever, and when they parted, each to take the route agreed on, they turned back to utter affectionate expressions, which the echoes of the Dunes repeated. At last they lost sight of each other.

"*Sacrebleu*! D'Artagnan," said Porthos, "I must out with it at once, for I can't keep to myself anything I have against you; I haven't been able to recognize you in this matter."

"Why not?" said D'Artagnan, with his wise smile.

"Because if, as you say, Athos and Aramis are in real danger, this is not the time to abandon them. For my part, I confess to you that I was already to follow them and am still ready to rejoin them, in spite of all the Mazarins in the world."

"You would be right, Porthos, but for one thing, which may change the current of your ideas; and that is, that it is not those gentlemen who are in the greatest danger, it is ourselves; it is not to abandon them that we have separated, but to avoid compromising them."

"Really?" said Porthos, opening his eyes in astonishment.

"Yes, no doubt. If they are arrested they will only be put in the Bastille; if we are arrested it is a matter of the Place de Grève."

"Oh! oh!" said Porthos, "there is quite a gap between that fate and the baronial coronet you promised me, D'Artagnan."

"Bah! perhaps not so great as you think, Porthos; you know the proverb, 'All roads lead to Rome.'"

"But how is it that we are incurring greater risks than Athos and Aramis?" asked Porthos.

"Because they have but fulfilled the mission confided to them by Queen Henrietta and we have betrayed that confided to us by Mazarin; because, going hence as emissaries to Cromwell, we became partisans of King Charles; because, instead of helping cut off the royal head condemned by those fellows called Mazarin, Cromwell, Joyce, Bridge, Fairfax, etc., we very nearly succeeded in saving it."

"Upon my word that is true," said Porthos; "but how can you suppose, my dear friend, that in the midst of his great preoccupations General Cromwell has had time to think ——"

"Cromwell thinks of everything; Cromwell has time for everything; and believe me, dear friend, we ought not to lose our time — it is precious. We shall not be safe till we have seen Mazarin, and then ——"

"The devil!" said Porthos; "what can we say to Mazarin?"

"Leave that to me — I have my plan. He laughs best who laughs last. Cromwell is mighty, Mazarin is tricky, but I would rather have to do with them than with the late Monsieur Mordaunt."

"Ah!" said Porthos, "it is very pleasant to be able to say 'the late Monsieur Mordaunt.'"

"My faith, yes," said D'Artagnan. "But we must be going."

The two immediately started across country toward the road to Paris, followed by Musqueton, who, after being too cold all night, at the end of a quarter of an hour found himself too warm.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE RETURN.

DURING the six weeks that Athos and Aramis had been absent from France, the Parisians, finding themselves one morning without either queen or king, were greatly annoyed at being thus deserted, and the absence of Mazarin, a thing so long desired, did not compensate for that of the two august fugitives.

The first feeling that pervaded Paris on hearing of the flight to Saint Germain, was that sort of affright which seizes children when they awake in the night and find themselves alone. A deputation was therefore sent to the queen to entreat her to return to Paris ; but she not only declined to receive the deputies, but sent an intimation by Chancellor Seguier, implying that if the parliament did not humble itself before her majesty by negativing all the questions that had been the cause of the quarrel, Paris would be besieged the very next day.

This threatening answer, unluckily for the court, produced quite a different effect to that which was intended. It wounded the pride of the parliament, which, supported by the citizens, replied by declaring that Cardinal Mazarin was the cause of all the discontent ; denounced him as the enemy both of the king and the state, and ordered him to retire from the court that same day and from France within a week afterward ; enjoining, in case of disobedience on his part, all the subjects of the king to pursue and take him.

Mazarin being thus placed beyond the pale of the protection of the law, preparations on both sides were commenced — by the queen, to attack Paris, by the citizens, to defend

it. The latter were occupied in breaking up the pavement and stretching chains across the streets, when, headed by the coadjutor, appeared the Prince de Conti (the brother of the Prince de Condé) and the Duc de Longueville, his brother-in-law. This unexpected band of auxiliaries arrived in Paris on the tenth of January and the Prince of Conti was named, but not until after a stormy discussion, generalissimo of the army of the king, out of Paris.

As for the Duc de Beaufort, he arrived from Vendôme, according to the annals of the day, bringing with him his high bearing and his long and beautiful hair, qualifications which gained him the sovereignty of the market-places.

The Parisian army had organized with the promptness characteristic of the bourgeois whenever they are moved by any sentiment whatever to disguise themselves as soldiers. On the nineteenth the impromptu army had attempted a sortie, more to assure itself and others of its actual existence than with any more serious intention. They carried a banner, on which could be read this strange device: "*We are seeking our king.*"

The next following days were occupied in trivial movements which resulted only in the carrying off of a few herds of cattle and the burning of two or three houses.

That was still the situation of affairs up to the early days of February. On the first day of that month our four companions had landed at Boulogne, and, in two parties, had set out for Paris. Toward the end of the fourth day of the journey Athos and Aramis reached Nanterre, which place they cautiously passed by on the outskirts, fearing that they might encounter some troop from the queen's army.

It was against his will that Athos took these precautions, but Aramis had very judiciously reminded him that they had no right to be imprudent, that they had been charged by King Charles with a supreme and sacred mission, which, received at the foot of the scaffold, could be accomplished only at the feet of Queen Henrietta. Upon that, Athos yielded.

On reaching the capital Athos and Aramis found it in arms. The sentinel at the gate refused even to let them pass, and called his sergeant.

The sergeant, with the air of importance which such people assume when they are clad with military dignity, said:

"Who are you, gentlemen?"

"Two gentlemen."

"And where do you come from?"

"From London."

"And what are you going to do in Paris?"

"We are going with a mission to Her Majesty, the Queen of England."

"Ah, every one seems to be going to see the queen of England. We have already at the station three gentlemen whose passports are under examination, who are on their way to her majesty. Where are your passports?"

"We have none; we left England, ignorant of the state of politics here, having left Paris before the departure of the king."

"Ah!" said the sergeant, with a cunning smile, "you are Mazarinists, who are sent as spies."

"My dear friend," here Athos spoke, "rest assured, if we were Mazarinists we should come well prepared with every sort of passport. In your situation distrust those who are well provided with every formality."

"Enter the guardroom," said the sergeant; "we will lay your case before the commandant of the post."

The guardroom was filled with citizens and common people, some playing, some drinking, some talking. In a corner, almost hidden from view, were three gentlemen, who had preceded Athos and Aramis, and an officer was examining their passports. The first impulse of these three, and of those who last entered, was to cast an inquiring glance at each other. The first arrivals wore long cloaks, in whose drapery they were carefully enveloped; one of them, shorter than the rest, remained pertinaciously in the background.

When the sergeant on entering the room announced that

in all probability he was bringing in two Mazarinists, it appeared to be the unanimous opinion of the officers on guard that they ought not to pass.

"Be it so," said Athos; "yet it is probable, on the contrary, that we shall enter, because we seem to have to do with sensible people. There seems to be only one thing to do, which is, to send our names to Her Majesty the Queen of England, and if she engages to answer for us I presume we shall be allowed to enter."

On hearing these words the shortest of the other three men seemed more attentive than ever to what was going on, wrapping his cloak around him more carefully than before.

"Merciful goodness!" whispered Aramis to Athos, "did you see?"

"What?" asked Athos.

"The face of the shortest of those three gentlemen?"

"No."

"He looked to me — but 'tis impossible."

At this instant the sergeant, who had been for his orders, returned, and pointing to the three gentlemen in cloaks, said:

"The passports are in order; let these three gentlemen pass."

The three gentlemen bowed and hastened to take advantage of this permission.

Aramis looked after them, and as the last of them passed close to him he pressed the hand of Athos.

"What is the matter with you, my friend?" asked the latter.

"I have — doubtless I am dreaming; tell me, sir," he said to the sergeant, "do you know those three gentlemen who are just gone out?"

"Only by their passports; they are three Frondists, who are gone to rejoin the Duc de Longueville."

"'Tis strange," said Aramis, almost involuntarily; "I fancied that I recognized Mazarin himself."

The sergeant burst into a fit of laughter.

"He!" he cried; "he venture himself amongst us, to be hung! Not so foolish as all that."

"Ah!" muttered Athos, "I may be mistaken, I haven't the unerring eye of D'Artagnan."

"Who is speaking of Monsieur d'Artagnan?" asked an officer who appeared at that moment upon the threshold of the room.

"What!" cried Aramis and Athos, "what! *Planchet*!"

"Planchet," added Grimaud; "Planchet, with a gorget, indeed!"

"Ah, gentlemen!" cried Planchet, "so you are back again in Paris. Oh, how happy you make us! no doubt you come to join the princes!"

"As thou seest, Planchet," said Aramis, whilst Athos smiled on seeing what important rank was held in the city militia by the former comrade of Musqueton, Bazin and Grimaud.

"And Monsieur d'Artagnan, of whom you spoke just now, Monsieur d'Herblay; may I ask if you have any news of him?"

"We parted from him four days ago and we have reason to believe that he has reached Paris before us."

"No, sir; I am sure he hasn't yet arrived. But then he may have stopped at Saint Germain."

"I don't think so; we appointed to meet at La Chevette."

"I was there this very day."

"And had the pretty Madeleine no news?" asked Aramis, smiling.

"No, sir, and it must be admitted that she seemed very anxious."

"In fact," said Aramis, "there is no time lost and we made our journey quickly. Permit me, then, my dear Athos, without inquiring further about our friend, to pay my respects to M. Planchet."

"Ah, monsieur le chevalier," said Planchet, bowing.

"Lieutenant?" asked Aramis.

"Lieutenant, with a promise of becoming captain."

"'Tis capital; and pray, how did you acquire all these honors?"

"In the first place, gentlemen, you know that I was the means of Monsieur de Rochefort's escape; well, I was very near being hung by Mazarin and that made me more popular than ever."

"So, owing to your popularity ——"

"No; thanks to something better. You know, gentlemen, that I served the Piedmont regiment and had the honor of being a sergeant?"

"Yes."

"Well, one day when no one could drill a mob of citizens, who began to march, some with the right foot, others with the left, I succeeded, I did, in making them all begin with the same foot, and I was made lieutenant on the spot."

"So I presume," said Athos, "that you have a large number of the nobles with you?"

"Certainly. There are the Prince de Conti, the Duc de Longueville, the Duc de Beaufort, the Duc de Bouillon, the Maréchal de la Mothe, the Marquis de Sevigné, and I don't know who, for my part."

"And the Vicomte Raoul de Bragelonne?" inquired Athos, in a tremulous voice. "D'Artagnan told me that he had recommended him to your care, in parting."

"Yes, count; nor have I lost sight of him for a single instant since."

"Then," said Athos in a tone of delight, "he is well? no accident has happened to him?"

"None, sir."

"And he lives?"

"Still at the Hotel of the Great Charlemagne."

"And passes his time?"

"Sometimes with the queen of England, sometimes with Madame de Chevreuse. He and the Count de Guiche are like each other's shadows."

"Thanks, Planchet, thanks!" cried Athos, extending his hand to the lieutenant.

"Oh, sir!" Planchet only touched the tips of the count's fingers.

"Well, what are you doing, count — to a former lackey?"

"My friend," said Athos, "he has given me news of Raoul."

"And now, gentlemen," said Planchet, who had not heard what they were saying, "what do you intend to do?"

"Re-enter Paris, if you will let us, my good Planchet."

"Let you, sir? Now, as ever, I am nothing but your servant." Then turning to his men:

"Allow these gentlemen to pass," he said; "they are friends of the Duc de Beaufort."

"Long live the Duc de Beaufort!" cried the sentinels.

The sergeant drew near to Planchet.

"What! without passports?" he murmured.

"Without passports," said Planchet.

"Take notice, captain," he continued, giving Planchet his expected title, "take notice that one of the three men who just now went out from here told me privately to distrust these gentlemen."

"And I," said Planchet, with dignity, "I know them and I answer for them."

As he said this he pressed Grimaud's hand, who seemed honored by the distinction.

"Farewell till we meet again," said Aramis, as they took leave of Planchet; "if anything happens to us we shall blame you for it."

"Sir," said Planchet, "I am in all things at your service."

"That fellow is no fool," said Aramis, as he got on his horse.

"How should he be?" replied Athos, whilst mounting also, "seeing he was used so long to brush *your* hats."

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE AMBASSADORS.

THE two friends rode rapidly down the declivity of the Faubourg, but on arriving at the bottom were surprised to find that the streets of Paris had become rivers, and the open places lakes; after the great rains which fell in January the Seine had overflowed its banks and the river inundated half the capital. The two gentlemen were obliged, therefore, to get off their horses and take a boat; and in that strange manner they approached the Louvre.

Night had closed in, and Paris, seen thus, by the light of lanterns flickering on the pools of water, crowded with ferry-boats of every kind, including those that glittered with the armed patrols, with the watchword, passing from post to post — Paris presented such an aspect as to strongly seize the senses of Aramis, a man most susceptible to warlike impressions.

They reached the queen's apartments, but were compelled to stop in the ante-chamber, since her majesty was at that moment giving audience to gentlemen bringing her news from England.

"We, too," said Athos, to the footman who had given him that answer, "not only bring news from England, but have just come from there."

"What, then, are your names, gentlemen?"

"The Comte de la Fère and the Chevalier d'Herblay," said Aramis.

"Ah! in that case, gentlemen," said the footman, on hearing the names which the queen had so often pronounced with hope, "in that case it is another thing, and I think her

majesty will pardon me for not keeping you here a moment. Please follow me," and he went on before, followed by Athos and Aramis.

On arriving at the door of the room where the queen was receiving he made a sign for them to wait and opening the door :

"Madame," he said, "I hope your majesty will forgive me for disobeying your orders, when you learn that the gentlemen I have come to announce are the Comte de la Fère and the Chevalier d'Herblay."

On hearing those two names the queen uttered a cry of joy, which the two gentlemen heard.

"Poor queen!" murmured Athos.

"Oh, let them come in! let them come in," cried the young princess, bounding to the door.

The poor child was constant in her attendance on her mother and sought by her filial attentions to make her forget the absence of her two sons and her other daughter.

"Come in, gentlemen," repeated the princess, opening the door herself.

The queen was seated on a fauteuil and before her were standing two or three gentlemen, and among them the Duc de Châtillon, the brother of the nobleman killed eight or nine years previously in a duel on account of Madame de Longueville, on the Place Royale. All these gentlemen had been noticed by Athos and Aramis in the guardhouse, and when the two friends were announced they started and exchanged some words in a low tone. "Well, sirs!" cried the queen, on perceiving the two friends, "you have come, faithful friends! But the royal couriers have been more expeditious than you, and here are Monsieur de Flamarens and Monsieur de Châtillon, who bring me from Her Majesty the Queen Anne of Austria, the very latest intelligence."

Aramis and Athos were astounded by the calmness, even the gayety of the queen's manner.

"Go on with your recital, sirs," said the queen, turning to the Duc de Châtillon. "You said that His Majesty, King

Charles, my august consort, had been condemned to death by a majority of his subjects!"

"Yes, madame," Châtillon stammered out.

Athos and Aramis were more and more astonished.

"And that being conducted to the scaffold," resumed the queen — "oh, my lord! oh, my king! — and that being led to the scaffold he had been saved by an indignant people."

"Just so, madame," replied Châtillon, in so low a voice that though the two friends were listening eagerly they could hardly hear this affirmation.

The queen clasped her hands in enthusiastic gratitude, whilst her daughter threw her arms around her mother's neck and kissed her — her own eyes streaming with tears.

"Now, madame, nothing remains to me except to proffer my respectful homage," said Châtillon, who felt confused and ashamed beneath the stern gaze of Athos.

"One moment, yes," answered the queen. "One moment — I beg — for here are the Chevalier d'Herblay and the Comte de la Fère, just arrived from London, and they can give you, as eye-witnesses, such details as you can convey to the queen, my royal sister. Speak, gentlemen, speak — I am listening; conceal nothing, gloss over nothing. Since his majesty still lives, since the honor of the throne is safe, everything else is a matter of indifference to me."

Athos turned pale and laid his hand on his heart.

"Well!" exclaimed the queen, who remarked this movement and his paleness. "Speak, sir! I beg you to do so."

"I beg you to excuse me, madame; I wish to add nothing to the recital of these gentlemen until they perceive themselves that they have perhaps been mistaken."

"Mistaken!" cried the queen, almost suffocated by emotion; "mistaken! what has happened, then?"

"Sir," interposed Monsieur de Flamarens to Athos, "if we are mistaken the error has originated with the queen. I do not suppose you will have the presumption to set it to rights — that would be to accuse Her Majesty, Queen Anne, of falsehood."

"With the queen, sir?" replied Athos, in his calm, vibrating voice.

"Yes," murmured Flamarens, lowering his eyes.

Athos sighed deeply.

"Or rather, sir," said Aramis, with his peculiar irritating politeness, "the error of the person who was with you when we met you in the guardroom; for if the Comte de la Fère and I are not mistaken, we saw you in the company of a third gentleman."

Châtillon and Flamarens started.

"Explain yourself, count!" cried the queen, whose anxiety grew greater every moment. "On your brow I read despair — your lips falter ere you announce some terrible tidings — your hands tremble. Oh, my God! my God! what has happened?"

"Lord!" ejaculated the young princess, falling on her knees, "have mercy on us!"

"Sir," said Châtillon, "if you bring bad tidings it will be cruel in you to announce them to the queen."

Aramis went so close to Châtillon as almost to touch him.

"Sir," said he, with compressed lips and flashing eyes, "you have not the presumption to instruct the Comte de la Fère and myself what we ought to say here?"

During this brief altercation Athos, his hands on his heart, his head bent low, approached the queen and in a voice of deepest sorrow said:

"Madame, princes — who by nature are above other men — receive from Heaven courage to support greater misfortunes than those of lower rank, for their hearts are elevated as their fortunes. We ought not, therefore, I think, to act toward a queen so illustrious as your majesty as we should act toward a woman of our lowlier condition. Queen, destined as you are to endure every sorrow on this earth, hear the result of our unhappy mission."

Athos, kneeling down before the queen, trembling and very cold, drew from his bosom, inclosed in the same case, the order set in diamonds which the queen had given to

Lord de Winter and the wedding ring which Charles I. before his death had placed in the hands of Aramis. Since the moment he had first received these two mementoes Athos had never parted with them.

He opened the case and offered them to the queen with deep and silent anguish.

The queen stretched out her hand, seized the ring, pressed it convulsively to her lips — and without being able to breathe a sigh, to give vent to a sob, she extended her arms, became deadly pale, and fell senseless in the arms of her attendants and her daughter.

Athos kissed the hem of the robe of the widowed queen and rising, with a dignity that made a deep impression on those around :

"I, the Comte de la Fère, a gentleman who has never deceived any human being, swear before God and before this unhappy queen, that all that was possible to save the king of England was done whilst we were on English ground. Now, chevalier," he added, turning to Aramis, "let us go. Our duty is fulfilled."

"Not yet," said Aramis; "we have still a word to say to these gentlemen."

And turning to Châtillon: "Sir, be so good as not to go away without giving me an opportunity to tell you something I cannot say before the queen."

Châtillon bowed in token of assent, and they all went out, stopping at the window of a gallery on the ground floor.

"Sir," said Aramis, "you allowed yourself just now to treat us in a most extraordinary manner. That would not be endurable in any case, and is still less so on the part of those who came to bring the queen the message of a liar."

"Sir!" cried De Châtillon.

"What have you done with Monsieur de Bruy? Has he by any possibility gone to change his face, which was too like that of Monsieur de Mazarin? There is an abundance of Italian masks at the Palais Royal, from harlequin even to pantaloon."

"Chevalier! chevalier!" said Athos.

"Leave me alone," said Aramis impatiently. "You know well that I don't like to leave things half finished."

"Conclude, then, sir," answered De Châtillon, with as much hauteur as Aramis.

"Gentlemen," resumed Aramis, "any one but the Comte de la Fère and myself would have had you arrested — for we have friends in Paris — but we are contented with another course. Come and converse with us for just five minutes, sword in hand, upon this deserted terrace."

"One moment, gentlemen," cried Flamarens. "I know well that the proposition is tempting, but at present it is impossible to accept it."

"And why not?" said Aramis, in his tone of raillery. "Is it Mazarin's proximity that makes you so prudent?"

"Oh, you hear that, Flamarens!" said Châtillon. "Not to reply would be a blot on my name and my honor."

"That is my opinion," said Aramis.

"You will not reply, however, and these gentlemen, I am sure, will presently be of my opinion."

Aramis shook his head with a motion of indescribable insolence.

Châtillon saw the motion and put his hand to his sword.

"Willingly," replied De Châtillon.

"Duke," said Flamarens, "you forget that to-morrow you are to command an expedition of the greatest importance, projected by the prince, assented to by the queen. Until to-morrow evening you are not at your own disposal."

"Let it be then the day after to-morrow," said Aramis.

"To-morrow, rather," said De Châtillon, "if you will take the trouble of coming so far as the gates of Charonton."

"How can you doubt it, sir? For the pleasure of a meeting with you I would go to the end of the world."

"Very well, to-morrow, sir."

"I shall rely on it. Are you going to rejoin your cardinal? Swear first, on your honor, not to inform him of our return."

"Conditions?"

"Why not?"

"Because it is for victors to make conditions and you are not yet victors, gentlemen."

"Then let us draw on the spot. It is all one to us — to us who do not command to-morrow's expedition."

Châtillon and Flamarens looked at each other. There was such irony in the words and in the bearing of Aramis that the duke had great difficulty in bridling his anger, but at a word from Flamarens he restrained himself and contented himself with saying:

"You promise, sir — that's agreed — that I shall find you to-morrow at Charenton?"

"Oh, don't be afraid, sir," replied Aramis; and the two gentlemen shortly afterward left the Louvre.

"For what reason is all this fume and fury?" asked Athos. "What have they done to you?"

"They — did you not see what they did?"

"No."

"They laughed when we swore that we had done our duty in England. Now, if they believed us, they laughed in order to insult us; if they did not believe it they insulted us all the more. However, I'm glad not to fight them until to-morrow. I hope we shall have something better to do to-night than to draw the sword."

"What have we to do?"

"Egad! to take Mazarin."

Athos curled his lip with disdain.

"These undertakings do not suit me, as you know, Aramis."

"Why?"

"Because it is taking people unawares."

"Really, Athos, you would make a singular general. You would fight only by broad daylight, warn your foe before an attack, and never attempt anything by night lest you should be accused of taking advantage of the dark-

Athos smiled.

"You know one cannot change his nature," he said. "Besides, do you know what is our situation, and whether Mazarin's arrest wouldn't be rather an encumbrance than an advantage?"

"Say at once you disapprove of my proposal."

"I think you ought to do nothing, since you exacted a promise from these gentlemen not to let Mazarin know that we were in France."

"I have entered into no engagement and consider myself quite free. Come, come."

"Where?"

"Either to seek the Duc de Beaufort or the Duc de Bouillon, and to tell them about this."

"Yes, but on one condition → that we begin by the coadjutor. He is a priest, learned in cases of conscience, and we will tell him ours."

It was then agreed that they were to go first to Monsieur de Bouillon, as his house came first; but first of all Athos begged that he might go to the Hôtel du Grand Charlemagne, to see Raoul.

They re-entered the boat which had brought them to the Louvre and thence proceeded to the Halles; and taking up Grimaud and Blaisois, they went on foot to the Rue Guénégaud.

But Raoul was not at the Hôtel du Grand Charlemagne. He had received a message from the prince, to whom he had hastened with Olivain the instant he had received it.

CHAPTER LXXVII,

THE THREE LIEUTENANTS OF THE GENERALISSIMO.

THE night was dark, but still the town resounded with those noises that disclose a city in a state of siege. Athos and Aramis did not proceed a hundred steps without being stopped by sentinels placed before the barricades, who demanded the watchword; and on their saying that they were going to Monsieur de Bouillon on a mission of importance a guide was given them under pretext of conducting them, but in fact as a spy over their movements.

On arriving at the Hôtel de Bouillon they came across a little troop of three cavaliers, who seemed to know every possible password; for they walked without either guide or escort, and on arriving at the barricades had nothing to do but to speak to those who guarded them, who instantly let them pass with evident deference, due probably to their high birth.

On seeing them Athos and Aramis stood still.

"Oh!" cried Aramis, "do you see, count?"

"Yes," said Athos.

"Who do these three cavaliers appear to you to be?"

"What do you think, Aramis?"

"Why, they are our men."

"You are not mistaken; I recognize Monsieur de Flamarens."

"And I, Monsieur de Châtillon."

"As to the cavalier in the brown cloak ——"

"It is the cardinal."

"In person."

"How the devil do they venture so near the Hôtel de Bouillon?"

Athos smiled, but did not reply. Five minutes afterward they knocked at the prince's door.

This door was guarded by a sentinel and there was also a guard placed in the courtyard, ready to obey the orders of the Prince de Conti's lieutenant.

Monsieur de Bouillon had the gout, but notwithstanding his illness, which had prevented his mounting on horseback for the last month — that is, since Paris had been besieged — he was ready to receive the Comte de la Fère and the Chevalier d'Herblay.

He was in bed, but surrounded with all the paraphernalia of war. Everywhere were swords, pistols, cuirasses, and arquebuses, and it was plain that as soon as his gout was better Monsieur de Bouillon would give a pretty tangle to the enemies of the parliament to unravel. Meanwhile, to his great regret, as he said, he was obliged to keep his bed.

"Ah, gentlemen," he cried, as the two friends entered, "you are very happy! you can ride, you can go and come and fight for the cause of the people. But I, as you see, am nailed to my bed — ah! this demon, gout — this demon, gout!"

"My lord," said Athos, "we are just arrived from England and our first concern is to inquire after your health."

"Thanks, gentlemen, thanks! As you see, my health is but indifferent. But you come from England. And King Charles is well, as I have just heard?"

"He is dead, my lord!" said Aramis.

"Pooh!" said the duke, too much astonished to believe it true.

"Dead on the scaffold; condemned by parliament."

"Impossible!"

"And executed in our presence."

"What, then, has Monsieur de Flamarens been telling me?"

"Monsieur de Flamarens?"

"Yes; he has just gone out."

Athos smiled. "With two companions?" he said.

"With two companions, yes," replied the duke. Then he added with a certain uneasiness, "Did you meet them?"

"Why, yes, I think so — in the street," said Athos; and he looked smilingly at Aramis, who looked at him with an expression of surprise.

"The devil take this gout!" cried Monsieur de Bouillon, evidently ill at ease.

"My lord," said Athos, "we admire your devotion to the cause you have espoused, in remaining at the head of the army whilst so ill, in so much pain."

"One must," replied Monsieur de Bouillon, "sacrifice one's comfort to the public good; but I confess to you I am now almost exhausted. My spirit is willing, my head is clear, but this demon, the gout, o'ercrows me. I confess, if the court would do justice to my claims and give the head of my house the title of prince, and if my brother De Turenne were reinstated in his command I would return to my estates and leave the court and parliament to settle things between themselves as they might."

"You are perfectly right, my lord."

"You think so? At this very moment the court is making overtures to me; hitherto I have repulsed them; but since such men as you assure me that I am wrong in doing so, I've a good mind to follow your advice and to accept a proposition made to me by the Duc de Châtillon just now."

"Accept it, my lord, accept it," said Aramis.

"Faith! yes. I am even sorry that this evening I almost repulsed — but there will be a conference to-morrow and we shall see."

The two friends saluted the duke.

"Go, gentlemen," he said; "you must be much fatigued after your voyage. Poor King Charles! But, after all, he was somewhat to blame in all that business and we may console ourselves with the reflection that France has no cause of reproach in the matter and did all she could to serve him."

"Oh! as to that," said Aramis, "we are witnesses. Mazarin especially ——"

"Yes, do you know, I am very glad to hear you give that testimony; the cardinal has some good in him, and if he were not a foreigner — well, he would be more justly estimated. Oh! the devil take this gout!"

Athos and Aramis took their leave, but even in the ante-chamber they could still hear the duke's cries; he was evidently suffering the tortures of the damned.

When they reached the street, Aramis said:

"Well, Athos, what do you think?"

"Of whom?"

"*Pardieu!* of Monsieur de Bouillon."

"My friend, I think that he is much troubled with gout."

"You noticed that I didn't breathe a word as to the purpose of our visit?"

"You did well; you would have caused him an access of his disease. Let us go to Monsieur de Beaufort."

The two friends went to the Hôtel de Vendôme. It was ten o'clock when they arrived. The Hôtel de Vendôme was not less guarded than the Hôtel de Bouillon, and presented as warlike an appearance. There were sentinels, a guard in the court, stacks of arms, and horses saddled. Two horsemen going out as Athos and Aramis entered were obliged to give place to them.

"Ah! ah! gentlemen," said Aramis, "decidedly it is a night for meetings. We shall be very unfortunate if, after meeting so often this evening, we should not succeed in meeting to-morrow."

"Oh, as to that, sir," replied Châtillon (for it was he who, with Flamarens, was leaving the Duc de Beaufort), "you may be assured; for if we meet by night without seeking each other, much more shall we meet by day, when wishing it."

"I hope that is true," said Aramis.

"As for me, I am sure of it," said the duke.

De Flamarens and De Châtillon continued on their way and Athos and Aramis dismounted.

Hardly had they given the bridles of their horses to their lackeys and rid themselves of their cloaks when a man approached them, and after looking at them for an instant by the doubtful light of the lantern hung in the centre of the courtyard he uttered an exclamation of joy and ran to embrace them.

"Comte de la Fère!" the man cried out; "Chevalier d'Herblay! How does it happen that you are in Paris?"

"Rochefort!" cried the two friends.

"Yes! we arrived four or five days ago from the Vendômois, as you know, and we are going to give Mazarin something to do. You are still with us, I presume?"

"More than ever. And the duke?"

"Furious against the cardinal. You know his success—our dear duke? He is really king of Paris; he can't go out without being mobbed by his admirers."

"Ah! so much the better! Can we have the honor of seeing his highness?"

"I shall be proud to present you," and Rochefort walked on. Every door was opened to him. Monsieur de Beaufort was at supper, but he rose quickly on hearing the two friends announced.

"Ah!" he cried, "by Jove! you're welcome, sirs. You are coming to sup with me, are you not? Boisgoli, tell Noirmont that I have two guests. You know Noirmont, do you not? The successor of Father Marteau, who makes the excellent pies you know of. Boisgoli, let him send one of his best, but not such a one as he made for La Ramee. Thank God! we don't want either rope ladders or gag-pears *now*."

"My lord," said Athos, "do not let us disturb you. We came merely to inquire after your health and to take your orders."

"As to my health, since it has stood five years of prison, with Monsieur de Chavigny to boot, 'tis excellent! As to my orders, since every one gives his own commands in our party, I shall end, if this goes on, by giving none at all."

"In short, my lord," said Athos, glancing at Aramis, "your highness is discontented with your party?"

"Discontented, sir! say my highness is furious! To such a degree, I assure you, though I would not say so to others, that if the queen, acknowledging the injuries she has done me, would recall my mother and give me the reversion of the admiralty, which belonged to my father and was promised me at his death, well! it would not be long before I should be training dogs to say that there were greater traitors in France than the Cardinal Mazarin!"

At this Athos and Aramis could not help exchanging not only a look but a smile; and had they not known it for a fact, this would have told them that De Châtillon and De Flamarens had been there.

"My lord," said Athos, "we are satisfied; we came here only to express our loyalty and to say that we are at your lordship's service and his most faithful servants."

"My most faithful friends, gentlemen, my most faithful friends; you have proved it. And if ever I am reconciled with the court I shall prove to you, I hope, that I remain your friend, as well as that of — what the devil are their names — D'Artagnan and Porthos?"

"D'Artagnan and Porthos."

"Ah, yes. You understand, then, Comte de la Fère, you understand, Chevalier d'Herblay, that I am altogether and always at your service."

Athos and Aramis bowed and went out.

"My dear Athos," cried Aramis, "I think you consented to accompany me only to give me a lesson — God forgive me!"

"Wait a little, Aramis; it will be time for you to perceive my motive when we have paid our visit to the coadjutor."

"Let us then go to the archiepiscopal palace," said Aramis.

They directed their horses to the city. On arriving at the cradle from which Paris sprang they found it inundated with water, and it was again necessary to take a boat. The

palace rose from the bosom of the water, and to see the number of boats around it one would have fancied one's self not in Paris, but in Venice. Some of these boats were dark and mysterious, others noisy and lighted up with torches. The friends slid in through this congestion of embarkation and landed in their turn. The palace was surrounded with water, but a kind of staircase had been fixed to the lower walls; and the only difference was, that instead of entering by the doors, people entered by the windows.

Thus did Athos and Aramis make their appearance in the ante-chamber, where about a dozen noblemen were collected in waiting.

"Good heavens!" said Aramis to Athos, "does the coadjutor intend to indulge himself in the pleasure of making us cool our hearts off in his ante-chamber?"

"My dear friend, we must take people as we find them. The coadjutor is at this moment one of the seven kings of Paris, and has a court. Let us send in our names, and if he does not send us a suitable message we will leave him to his own affairs or those of France. Let us call one of these lackeys, with a demi-pistole in the left hand."

"Exactly so," cried Aramis. "Ah! if I'm not mistaken here's Bazin. Come here, fellow."

Bazin, who was crossing the ante-chamber majestically in his clerical dress, turned around to see who the impertinent gentleman was who thus addressed him; but seeing his friends he went up to them quickly and expressed delight at seeing them.

"A truce to compliments," said Aramis; "we want to see the coadjutor, and instantly, as we are in haste."

"Certainly, sir — it is not such lords as you are who are allowed to wait in the ante-chamber, only just now he has a secret conference with Monsieur de Bruy."

"De Bruy!" cried the friends; "'tis then useless our seeing monsieur the coadjutor this evening," said Aramis, "so we give it up."

And they hastened to quit the palace, followed by Bazin, who was lavish of bows and compliments.

"Well," said Athos, when Aramis and he were in the boat again, "are you beginning to be convinced that we should have done a bad turn to all these people in arresting Mazarin?"

"You are wisdom incarnate, Athos," Aramis replied.

What had especially been observed by the two friends was the little interest taken by the court of France in the terrible events which had occurred in England, which they thought should have arrested the attention of all Europe.

In fact, aside from a poor widow and a royal orphan who wept in the corner of the Louvre, no one appeared to be aware that Charles I. had ever lived and that he had perished on the scaffold.

The two friends made an appointment for ten o'clock on the following day; for though the night was well advanced when they reached the door of the hotel, Aramis said that he had certain important visits to make and left Athos to enter alone.

At ten o'clock the next day they met again. Athos had been out since six o'clock.

"Well, have you any news?" Athos asked.

"Nothing. No one has seen D'Artagnan and Porthos has not appeared. Have you anything?"

"Nothing."

"The devil!" said Aramis.

"In fact," said Athos, "this delay is not natural; they took the shortest route and should have arrived before we did."

"Add to that D'Artagnan's rapidity in action and that he is not the man to lose an hour, knowing that we were expecting him."

"He expected, you will remember, to be here on the fifth."

"And here we are at the ninth. This evening the margin of possible delay expires."

"What do you think should be done," asked Athos, "if we have no news of them to-night?"

"*Pardieu!* we must go and look for them."

"All right," said Athos.

"But Raoul?" said Aramis.

A light cloud passed over the count's face.

"Raoul gives me much uneasiness," he said. "He received yesterday a message from the Prince de Condé; he went to meet him at Saint Cloud and has not returned."

"Have you seen Madame de Chevreuse?"

"She was not at home. And you, Aramis, you were going, I think, to visit Madame de Longueville."

"I did go there."

"Well?"

"She was no longer there, but she had left her new address."

"Where was she?"

"Guess; I give you a thousand chances."

"How should I know where the most beautiful and active of the Frondists was at midnight? for I presume it was when you left me that you went to visit her."

"At the Hôtel de Ville, my dear fellow."

"What! at the Hôtel de Ville? Has she, then, been appointed provost of merchants?"

"No; but she has become queen of Paris, *ad interim*, and since she could not venture at once to establish herself in the Palais Royal or the Tuileries, she is installed at the Hôtel de Ville, where she is on the point of giving an heir or an heiress to that dear duke."

"You didn't tell me of that, Aramis."

"Really? It was my forgetfulness then; pardon me."

"Now," asked Athos, "what are we to do with ourselves till evening? Here we are without occupation, it seems to me."

"You forget, my friend, that we have work cut out for us in the direction of Charenton; I hope to see Monsieur de Châtillon, whom I've hated for a long time, there."

"Why have you hated him?"

"Because he is the brother of Coligny."

"Ah, true! he who presumed to be a rival of yours, for

which he was severely punished; that ought to satisfy you."

"Yes, but it does not; I am rancorous — the only stigma that proves me to be a churchman. Do you understand? You understand that you are in no way obliged to go with me."

"Come, now," said Athos, "you are joking."

"In that case, my dear friend, if you are resolved to accompany me there is no time to lose; the drum beats; I observed cannon on the road; I saw the citizens in order of battle on the Place of the Hôtel de Ville; certainly the fight will be in the direction of Charenton, as the Duc de Châtillon said."

"I supposed," said Athos, "that last night's conferences would modify those warlike arrangements."

"No doubt; but they will fight, none the less, if only to mask the conferences."

"Poor creatures!" said Athos, "who are going to be killed, in order that Monsieur de Bouillon may have his estate at Sedan restored to him, that the reversion of the admiralty may be given to the Duc de Beaufort, and that the coadjutor may be made a cardinal."

"Come, come, dear Athos, confess that you would not be so philosophical if your Raoul were to be involved in this affair."

"Perhaps you speak the truth, Aramis."

"Well, let us go, then, where the fighting is, for that is the most likely place to meet with D'Artagnan, Porthos, and possibly even Raoul. Stop, there are a fine body of citizens passing; quite attractive, by Jupiter! and their captain — see! he has the true military style."

"What, ho!" said Grimaud.

"What?" asked Athos.

"Planchet, sir."

"Lieutenant yesterday," said Aramis, "captain to-day, colonel, doubtless, to-morrow; in a fortnight the fellow will be marshal of France."

"Question him about the fight," said Athos.

Planchet, prouder than ever of his new duties, deigned to explain to the two gentlemen that he was ordered to take up his position on the Place Royale with two hundred men, forming the rear of the army of Paris, and to march on Charenton when necessary.

"This day will be a warm one," said Planchet, in a war-like tone.

"No doubt," said Aramis, "but it is far from here to the enemy."

"Sir, the distance will be diminished," said a subordinate.

Aramis saluted, then turning toward Athos:

"I don't care to camp on the Place Royale with all these people," he said. "Shall we go forward? We shall see better what is going on."

"And then Monsieur de Châtillon will not come to the Place Royale to look for you. Come, then, my friend, we will go forward."

"Haven't you something to say to Monsieur de Flamarens on your own account?"

"My friend," said Athos, "I have made a resolution never to draw my sword save when it is absolutely necessary."

"And how long ago was that?"

"When I last drew my poniard."

"Ah! Good! another souvenir of Monsieur Mordaunt. Well, my friend, nothing now is lacking except that you should feel remorse for having killed that fellow."

"Hush!" said Athos, putting a finger on his lips, with the sad smile peculiar to him; "let us talk no more of Mordaunt—it will bring bad luck." And Athos set forward toward Charenton, followed closely by Aramis.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE BATTLE OF CHARENTON.

As Athos and Aramis proceeded, and passed different companies on the road, they became aware that they were arriving near the field of battle.

"Ah! my friend!" cried Athos, suddenly, "where have you brought us? I fancy I perceive around us faces of different officers in the royal army; is not that the Duc de Châtillon himself coming toward us with his brigadiers?"

"Good-day, sirs," said the duke, advancing; "you are puzzled by what you see here, but one word will explain everything. There is now a truce and a conference. The prince, Monsieur de Retz, the Duc de Beaufort, the Duc de Bouillon, are talking over public affairs. Now one of two things must happen: either matters will not be arranged, or they will be arranged, in which last case I shall be relieved of my command and we shall still meet again."

"Sir," said Aramis, "you speak to the point. Allow me to ask you a question: Where are the plenipotentiaries?"

"At Charenton, in the second house on the right on entering from the direction of Paris."

"And was this conference arranged beforehand?"

"No, gentlemen; it seems to be the result of certain propositions which Mazarin made last night to the Parisians."

Athos and Aramis exchanged smiles; for they well knew what those propositions were, to whom they had been made and who had made them.

"And that house in which the plenipotentiaries are," asked Athos, "belongs to——"

"To Monsieur de Chanleu, who commands your troops at Charenton. I say your troops, for I presume that you gentlemen are Frondeurs?"

"Yes, almost," said Aramis.

"We are for the king and the princes," added Athos.

"We must understand each other," said the duke. "The king is with us and his generals are the Duke of Orleans and the Prince de Condé, although I must add 'tis almost impossible now to know to which party any one belongs."

"Yes," answered Athos, "but his right place is in our ranks, with the Prince de Conti, De Beaufort, D'Elbeuf, and De Bouillon; but, sir, supposing that the conference is broken off — are you going to try to take Charenton?"

"Such are my orders."

"Sir, since you command the cavalry ——"

"Pardon me, I am commander-in-chief."

"So much the better. You must know all your officers — I mean those more distinguished."

"Why, yes, very nearly."

"Will you then kindly tell me if you have in your command the Chevalier d'Artagnan, lieutenant in the musketeers?"

"No, sir, he is not with us; he left Paris more than six weeks ago and is believed to have gone on a mission to England."

"I knew that, but I supposed he had returned."

"No, sir; no one has seen him. I can answer positively on that point, for the musketeers belong to our forces and Monsieur de Cambon, the substitute for Monsieur d'Artagnan, still holds his place."

The two friends looked at each other.

"You see," said Athos.

"It is strange," said Aramis.

"It is absolutely certain that some misfortune has happened to them on the way."

"If we have no news of them this evening, to-morrow we must start."

Athos nodded affirmatively, then turning :

"And Monsieur de Bragelonne, a young man fifteen years of age, attached to the Prince de Condé — has he the honor of being known to you?" diffident in allowing the sarcastic Aramis to perceive how strong were his paternal feelings.

"Yes, surely, he came with the prince; a charming young man; he is one of your friends then, monsieur le comte?"

"Yes, sir," answered Athos, agitated; "so much so that I wish to see him if possible."

"Quite possible, sir; do me the favor to accompany me and I will conduct you to headquarters."

"Halloo, there!" cried Aramis, turning around; "what a noise behind us!"

"A body of cavaliers is coming toward us," said Châtillon.

"I recognize the coadjutor by his Frondist hat."

"And I the Duc de Beaufort by his white plume of ostrich feathers."

"They are coming, full gallop; the prince is with them — ah! he is leaving them!"

"They are beating the rappel!" cried Châtillon; "we must discover what is going on."

In fact, they saw the soldiers running to their arms; the trumpets sounded; the drums beat; the Duc de Beaufort drew his sword. On his side the prince sounded a rappel and all the officers of the royalist army, mingling momentarily with the Parisian troops, ran to him.

"Gentlemen," cried Châtillon, "the truce is broken, that is evident; they are going to fight; go, then, into Charenton, for I shall begin in a short time — there's a signal from the prince!"

The cornet of a troop had in fact just raised the standard of the prince.

"Farewell, till the next time we meet," cried Châtillon, and he set off, full gallop.

Athos and Aramis turned also and went to salute the coadjutor and the Duc de Beaufort. As to the Duc de Bouillon, he had such a fit of gout as obliged him to return

to Paris in a litter ; but his place was well filled by the Duc D'Elbeuf and his four sons, ranged around him like a staff. Meantime, between Charenton and the royal army was left a space which looked ready to serve as a last resting place for the dead.

"Gentlemen," cried the coadjutor, tightening his sash, which he wore, after the fashion of the ancient military prelates, over his archiepiscopal simar, "there's the enemy approaching. Let us save them half of their journey."

And without caring whether he were followed or not he set off; his regiment, which bore the name of the regiment of Corinth, from the name of his archbishopric, darted after him and began the fight. Monsieur de Beaufort sent his cavalry toward Etampes and Monsieur de Chanleu, who defended the place, was ready to resist an assault, or, if the enemy were repulsed, to attempt a sortie.

The battle soon became general and the coadjutor performed miracles of valor. His proper vocation had always been the sword and he was delighted whenever he could draw it from the scabbard, no matter for whom or against whom.

Chanleu, whose fire at one time repulsed the royal regiment, thought that the moment was come to pursue it; but it was reformed and led again to the charge by the Duc de Châtillon in person. This charge was so fierce, so skillfully conducted, that Chanleu was almost surrounded. He commanded a retreat, which began, step by step, foot by foot; unhappily, in an instant he fell, mortally wounded. De Châtillon saw him fall and announced it in a loud voice to his men, which raised their spirits and completely disheartened their enemies, so that every man thought only of his own safety and tried to gain the trenches, where the coadjutor was trying to reform his disorganized regiment.

Suddenly a squadron of cavalry galloped up to encounter the royal troops, who were entering, *pêle-mêle*, the intrenchments with the fugitives. Athos and Aramis charged at the head of their squadrons; Aramis with sword and pistol in

his hands, Athos with his sword in his scabbard, his pistol in his saddle-bags; calm and cool as if on the parade, except that his noble and beautiful countenance became sad as he saw slaughtered so many men who were sacrificed on the one side to the obstinacy of royalty and on the other to the personal rancor of the princes. Aramis, on the contrary, struck right and left and was almost delirious with excitement. His bright eyes kindled, and his mouth, so finely formed, assumed a wicked smile; every blow he aimed was sure, and his pistol finished the deed — annihilated the wounded wretch who tried to rise again.

On the opposite side two cavaliers, one covered with a gilt cuirass, the other wearing simply a buff doublet, from which fell the sleeves of a vest of blue velvet, charged in front. The cavalier in the gilt cuirass fell upon Aramis and struck a blow that Aramis parried with his wonted skill.

"Ah! 'tis you, Monsieur de Châtillon," cried the chevalier; "welcome to you — I expected you."

"I hope I have not made you wait too long, sir," said the duke; "at all events, here I am."

"Monsieur de Châtillon," cried Aramis, taking from his saddle-bags a second pistol, "I think if your pistols have been discharged you are a dead man."

"Thank God, sir, they are not!"

And the duke, pointing his pistol at Aramis, fired. But Aramis bent his head the instant he saw the duke's finger press the trigger and the ball passed without touching him.

"Oh! you've missed me," cried Aramis; "but I swear to Heaven I will not miss you."

"If I give you time!" cried the duke, spurring on his horse and rushing upon him with his drawn sword.

Aramis awaited him with that terrible smile which was peculiar to him on such occasions, and Athos, who saw the duke advancing toward Aramis with the rapidity of lightning, was just going to cry out, "Fire! fire, then!" when the shot was fired. De Châtillon opened his arms and fell back on the crupper of his horse.

The ball had entered his breast through a notch in the cuirass.

"I am a dead man," he said, and fell from his horse to the ground.

"I told you this; I am now grieved I have kept my word. Can I be of any use to you?"

Châtillon made a sign with his hand and Aramis was about to dismount when he received a violent shock; 'twas a thrust from a sword, but his cuirass turned aside the blow.

He turned around and seized his new antagonist by the wrist, when he started back, exclaiming, "Raoul!"

"Raoul?" cried Athos.

The young man recognized at the same instant the voices of his father and the Chevalier d'Herblay; two officers in the Parisian forces rushed at that instant on Raoul, but Aramis protected him with his sword.

"My prisoner!" he cried.

Athos took his son's horse by the bridle and led him forth out of the *mêlée*.

At this crisis of the battle, the prince, who had been seconding De Châtillon in the second line, appeared in the midst of the fight; his eagle eye made him known and his blows proclaimed the hero.

On seeing him, the regiment of Corinth, which the coadjutor had not been able to reorganize in spite of all his efforts, threw itself into the midst of the Parisian forces, put them into confusion and re-entered Charenton flying. The coadjutor, dragged along with his fugitive forces, passed near the group formed by Athos, Raoul and Aramis. Aramis could not in his jealousy avoid being pleased at the coadjutor's misfortune, and was about to utter some *bon mot* more witty than correct, when Athos stopped him.

"On, on!" he cried, "this is no moment for compliments; or rather, back, for the battle seems to be lost by the Frondeurs."

"It is a matter of indifference to me," said Aramis; "I

came here only to meet De Châtillon ; I have met him, I am contented ; 'tis something to have met De Châtillon in a duel ! ”

“ And besides, we have a prisoner,” said Athos, pointing to Raoul.

The three cavaliers continued their road on full gallop.

“ What were you doing in the battle, my friend ? ” inquired Athos of the youth ; “ 'twas not your right place, I think, as you were not equipped for an engagement ! ”

“ I had no intention of fighting to-day, sir ; I was charged, indeed, with a mission to the cardinal and had set out for Rueil, when, seeing Monsieur de Châtillon charge, an invincible desire possessed me to charge at his side. It was then that he told me two cavaliers of the Parisian army were seeking me and named the Comte de la Fère.”

“ What ! you knew we were there and yet wished to kill your friend the chevalier ? ”

“ I did not recognize the chevalier in armor, sir ! ” said Raoul, blushing ; “ though I might have known him by his skill and coolness in danger.”

“ Thank you for the compliment, my young friend,” replied Aramis, “ we can see from whom you learned courtesy. Then you were going to Rueil ? ”

“ Yes ! I have a despatch from the prince to his eminence.”

“ You must still deliver it,” said Athos.

“ No false generosity, count ! the fate of our friends, to say nothing of our own, is perhaps in that very despatch.”

“ This young man must not, however, fail in his duty,” said Athos.

“ In the first place, count, this youth is our prisoner ; you seem to forget that. What I propose to do is fair in war ; the vanquished must not be dainty in the choice of means. Give me the despatch, Raoul.”

The young man hesitated and looked at Athos as if seeking to read in his eyes a rule of conduct.

“ Give him the despatch, Raoul ! you are the chevalier's prisoner.”

Raoul gave it up reluctantly ; Aramis instantly seized and read it.

" You," he said, " you, who are so trusting, read and reflect that there is something in this letter important for us to see."

Athos took the letter, frowning, but an idea that he should find something in this letter about D'Artagnan conquered his unwillingness to read it.

" My lord, I shall send this evening to your eminence, in order to reinforce the troop of Monsieur de Comminges, the ten men you demand. They are good soldiers, fit to confront the two violent adversaries whose address and resolution your eminence is fearful of."

" Oh ! " cried Athos.

" Well," said Aramis, " what think you about these two enemies whom it requires, besides Comminges's troop, ten good soldiers to confront ; are they not as like as two drops of water to D'Artagnan and Porthos ? "

" We'll search Paris all day long," said Athos, " and if we have no news this evening we will return to the road to Picardy ; and I feel no doubt that, thanks to D'Artagnan's ready invention, we shall then find some clew which will solve our doubts."

" Yes, let us search Paris and especially inquire of Planchet if he has yet heard from his former master."

" That poor Planchet ! You speak of him very much at your ease, Aramis ; he has probably been killed. All those fighting citizens went out to battle and they have been massacred."

It was, then, with a sentiment of uneasiness whether Planchet, who alone could give them information, was alive or dead, that the friends returned to the Place Royale ; to their great surprise they found the citizens still encamped there, drinking and bantering each other, although, doubtless, mourned by their families, who thought they were at Charenton in the thickest of the fighting.

Athos and Aramis again questioned Planchet, but he had

seen nothing of D'Artagnan ; they wished to take Planchet with them, but he could not leave his troop, who at five o'clock returned home, saying that they were returning from the battle, whereas they had never lost sight of the bronze equestrian statue of Louis XIII.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE ROAD TO PICARDY.

IN leaving Paris, Athos and Aramis well knew that they would be encountering great danger ; but we know that for men like these there could be no question of danger. Besides, they felt that the *dénouement* of this second Odyssey was at hand and that there remained but a single effort to make.

Besides, there was no tranquillity in Paris itself. Provisions began to fail, and whenever one of the Prince de Conti's generals wished to gain more influence he got up a little popular tumult, which he put down again, and thus for the moment gained a superiority over his colleagues.

In one of these risings the Duc de Beaufort pillaged the house and library of Mazarin, in order to give the populace, as he put it, something to gnaw at. Athos and Aramis left Paris after this *coup-d'état*, which took place on the very evening of the day in which the Parisians had been beaten at Charenton.

They quitted Paris, beholding it abandoned to extreme want, bordering on famine ; agitated by fear, torn by faction. Parisians and Frondeurs as they were, the two friends expected to find the same misery, the same fears, the same intrigue in the enemy's camp ; but what was their surprise, after passing Saint Denis, to hear that at Saint Germain people were singing and laughing, and leading generally cheerful lives. The two gentlemen traveled by byways in order not to encounter the Mazarinists scattered about the Isle of France, and also to escape the Frondeurs, who were in possession of Normandy and who never failed to conduct captives to the Duc de Longueville, in order that he might

ascertain whether they were friends or foes. Having escaped these dangers, they returned by the main road to Boulogne, at Abbeville, and followed it step by step, examining every track.

Nevertheless, they were still in a state of uncertainty. Several inns were visited by them, several innkeepers questioned, without a single clew being given to guide their inquiries, when at Montreuil Athos felt upon the table that something rough was touching his delicate fingers. He turned up the cloth and found these hieroglyphics carved upon the wood with a knife :

“Port D’Art 2d February.”

“This is capital !” said Athos to Aramis, “we were to have slept here, but we cannot — we must push on.” They rode forward and reached Abbeville. There the great number of inns puzzled them ; they could not go to all ; how could they guess in which those whom they were seeking had stayed ?

“Trust me,” said Aramis, “do not expect to find anything in Abbeville. If we had only been looking for Porthos, Porthos would have stationed himself in one of the finest hotels and we could easily have traced him. But D’Artagnan is devoid of such weaknesses. Porthos would have found it very difficult even to make him see that he was dying of hunger ; he has gone on his road as inexorable as fate and we must seek him somewhere else.”

They continued their route. It had now become a weary and almost hopeless task, and had it not been for the threefold motives of honor, friendship and gratitude, implanted in their hearts, our two travelers would have given up many a time their rides over the sand, their interrogatories of the peasantry and their close inspection of faces.

They proceeded thus to Péronne.

Athos began to despair. His noble nature felt that their ignorance was a sort of reflection upon them. They had not looked carefully enough for their lost friends. They had not shown sufficient pertinacity in their inquiries. They were willing and ready to retrace their steps, when, in cross-



Nature Fine

Pinson Sculp.

FRANÇOIS DE VENDÔME.
Duc de Beaufort
Né en Janr 1621. Luc au Sac de C. und le 20 Juin 1692

ing the suburb which leads to the gates of the town, upon a white wall which was at the corner of a street turning around the rampart, Athos cast his eyes upon a drawing in black chalk, which represented, with the awkwardness of a first attempt, two cavaliers riding furiously; one of them carried a roll of paper on which were written these words: "They are following us."

"Oh!" exclaimed Athos, "here it is, as clear as day; pursued as he was, D'Artagnan would not have tarried here five minutes had he been pressed very closely, which gives us hopes that he may have succeeded in escaping."

Aramis shook his head.

"Had he escaped we should either have seen him or have heard him spoken of."

"You are right, Aramis, let us travel on."

To describe the impatience and anxiety of these two friends would be impossible. Uneasiness took possession of the tender, constant heart of Athos, and fearful forecasts were the torment of the impulsive Aramis. They galloped on for two or three hours as furiously as the cavaliers on the wall. All at once, in a narrow pass, they perceived that the road was partially barricaded by an enormous stone. It had evidently been rolled across the pass by some arm of giant strength.

Aramis stopped.

"Oh!" he said, looking at the stone, "this is the work of either Hercules or Porthos. Let us get down, count, and examine this rock."

They both alighted. The stone had been brought with the evident intention of barricading the road, but some one having perceived the obstacle had partially turned it aside.

With the assistance of Blaisois and Grimaud the friends succeeded in turning the stone over. Upon the side next the ground were scratched the following words:

"Eight of the light dragoons are pursuing us. If we reach Compiègne we shall stop at the Peacock. It is kept by a friend of ours."

"At last we have something definite," said Athos; "let us go to the Peacock."

"Yes," answered Aramis, "but if we are to get there we must rest our horses, for they are almost broken-winded."

Aramis was right; they stopped at the first tavern and made each horse swallow a double quantity of corn steeped in wine; they gave them three hours' rest and then set off again. The men themselves were almost dead with fatigue, but hope supported them.

In six hours they reached Compiègne and alighted at the Peacock. The host proved to be a worthy man, as bald as a Chinaman. They asked him if some time ago he had not received in his house two gentlemen who were pursued by dragoons; without answering he went out and brought in the blade of a rapier.

"Do you know that?" he asked.

Athos merely glanced at it.

"'Tis D'Artagnan's sword," he said.

"Does it belong to the smaller or to the larger of the two?" asked the host.

"To the smaller."

"I see that you are the friends of these gentlemen."

"Well, what has happened to them?"

"They were pursued by eight of the light dragoons, who rode into the courtyard before they had time to close the gate."

"Eight!" said Aramis; "it surprises me that two such heroes as Porthos and D'Artagnan should have allowed themselves to be arrested by eight men."

"The eight men would doubtless have failed had they not been assisted by twenty soldiers of the regiment of Italians in the king's service, who are in garrison in this town — so that your friends were overpowered by numbers."

"Arrested, were they?" inquired Athos; "is it known why?"

"No, sir, they were carried off instantly, and had not even time to tell me why; but as soon as they were gone I found

this broken sword-blade, as I was helping to raise two dead men and five or six wounded ones."

"'Tis still a consolation that they were not wounded," said Aramis.

"Where were they taken?" asked Athos.

"Toward the town of Louvres," was the reply.

The two friends, having agreed to leave Blaisois and Grimaud at Compiègne with the horses, resolved to take post horses; and having snatched a hasty dinner they continued their journey to Louvres. Here they found only one inn, in which was consumed a liqueur which preserves its reputation to our time and which is still made in that town.

"Let us alight here," said Athos. "D'Artagnan will not have let slip an opportunity of drinking a glass of this liqueur, and at the same time leaving some trace of himself."

They went into the town and asked for two glasses of liqueur, at the counter—as their friends must have done before them. The counter was covered with a plate of pewter; upon this plate was written with the point of a large pin: "Rueil . . . D . . ."

"They went to Rueil," cried Aramis.

"Let us go to Rueil," said Athos.

"It is to throw ourselves into the wolf's jaws," said Aramis.

"Had I been as great a friend of Jonah as I am of D'Artagnan I should have followed him even into the inside of the whale itself; and you would have done the same, Aramis."

"Certainly—but you make me out better than I am, dear count. Had I been alone I should scarcely have gone to Rueil without great caution. But where you go, I go."

They then set off for Rueil. Here the deputies of the parliament had just arrived, in order to enter upon those famous conferences which were to last three weeks, and produced eventually that shameful peace, at the conclusion of which the prince was arrested. Rueil was crowded with

advocates, presidents and councillors, who came from the Parisians, and, on the side of the court, with officers and guards; it was therefore easy, in the midst of this confusion, to remain as unobserved as any one might wish; besides, the conferences implied a truce, and to arrest two gentlemen, even Frondeurs, at this time, would have been an attack on the rights of the people.

The two friends mingled with the crowd and fancied that every one was occupied with the same thought that tormented them. They expected to hear some mention made of D'Artagnan or of Porthos, but every one was engrossed by articles and reforms. It was the advice of Athos to go straight to the minister.

"My friend," said Aramis, "take care; our safety lies in our obscurity. If we were to make ourselves known we should be sent to rejoin our friends in some deep ditch, from which the devil himself could not take us out. Let us try not to find them out by accident, but from our own notions. Arrested at Compiègne, they have been carried to Rueil; at Rueil they have been questioned by the cardinal, who has either kept them near him or sent them to Saint Germain. As to the Bastille, they are not there, though the Bastille is especially for the Frondeurs. They are not dead, for the death of D'Artagnan would make a sensation. As for Porthos, I believe him to be eternal, like God, although less patient. Do not let us despond, but wait at Rueil, for my conviction is that they are at Rueil. But what ails you? You are pale."

"It is this," answered Athos, with a trembling voice. "I remember that at the Castle of Rueil the Cardinal Richelieu had some horrible 'oubliettes' constructed."

"Oh! never fear," said Aramis. "Richelieu was a gentleman, our equal in birth, our superior in position. He could, like the king, touch the greatest of us on the head, and touching them make such heads shake on their shoulders. But Mazarin is a low-born rogue, who can at the most take us by the collar, like an archer. Be calm — for I am sure

that D'Artagnan and Porthos are at Rueil, alive and well."

"But," resumed Athos, "I recur to my first proposal. I know no better means than to act with candor. I shall seek, not Mazarin, but the queen, and say to her, 'Madame, restore to us your two servants and our two friends.'"

Aramis shook his head.

"'Tis a last resource, but let us not employ it till it is imperatively called for; let us rather persevere in our researches."

They continued their inquiries and at last met with a light dragoon who had formed one of the guard which had escorted D'Artagnan to Rueil.

Athos, however, perpetually recurred to his proposed interview with the queen.

"In order to see the queen," said Aramis, "we must first see the cardinal; and when we have seen the cardinal — remember what I tell you, Athos — we shall be reunited to our friends, but not in the way you wish. Now, that way of joining them is not very attractive to me, I confess. Let us act in freedom, that we may act well and quickly."

"I shall go," he said, "to the queen."

"Well, then," answered Aramis, "pray tell me a day or two beforehand, that I may take that opportunity of going to Paris."

"To whom?"

"Zounds! how do I know? perhaps to Madame de Longueville. She is all-powerful yonder; she will help me. But send me word should you be arrested, for then I will return directly."

"Why do you not take your chance and be arrested with me?"

"No, I thank you."

"Should we, by being arrested, be all four together again, we should not, I am not sure, be twenty-four hours in prison without getting free."

"My friend, since I killed Châtillon, adored of the ladies of Saint Germain, I am too great a celebrity not to fear a

prison doubly. The queen is likely to follow Mazarin's counsels and to have me tried."

"Do you think she loves this Italian so much as they say she does?"

"Did she not love an Englishman?"

"My friend, she is a woman."

"No, no, you are deceived — she is a queen."

"Dear friend, I shall sacrifice myself and go and see Anne of Austria."

"Adieu, Athos, I am going to raise an army."

"For what purpose?"

"To come back and besiege Rueil."

"Where shall we meet again?"

"At the foot of the cardinal's gallows."

The two friends departed — Aramis to return to Paris, Athos to take measures preparatory to an interview with the queen.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE GRATITUDE OF ANNE OF AUSTRIA.

ARTHOS found much less difficulty than he had expected in obtaining an audience of Anne of Austria. It was granted, and was to take place after her morning's "levee," at which, in accordance with his rights of birth, he was entitled to be present. A vast crowd filled the apartments of Saint Germain. Anne had never at the Louvre had so large a court; but this crowd represented chiefly the second class of nobility, while the Prince de Conti, the Duc de Beaufort and the coadjutor assembled around them the first nobility of France.

The greatest possible gayety prevailed at court. The particular characteristic of this was that more songs were made than cannons fired during its continuance. The court made songs on the Parisians and the Parisians on the court; and the casualties, though not mortal, were painful, as are all wounds inflicted by the weapon of ridicule.

In the midst of this seeming hilarity, nevertheless, people's minds were uneasy. Was Mazarin to remain the favorite and minister of the queen? Was he to be carried back by the wind which had blown him there? Every one hoped so, so that the minister felt that all around him, beneath the homage of the courtiers, lay a fund of hatred, ill disguised by fear and interest. He felt ill at ease and at a loss what to do.

Condé himself, whilst fighting for him, lost no opportunity of ridiculing, of humbling him. The queen, on whom he threw himself as sole support, seemed to him now not much to be relied upon.

When the hour appointed for the audience arrived Athos was obliged to stay until the queen, who was waited upon by a new deputation from Paris, had consulted with her minister as to the propriety and manner of receiving them. All were fully engrossed with the affairs of the day; Athos could not therefore have chosen a more inauspicious moment to speak of his friends—poor atoms, lost in that raging whirlwind.

But Athos was a man of inflexible determination; he firmly adhered to a purpose once formed, when it seemed to him to spring from conscience and to be prompted by a sense of duty. He insisted on being introduced, saying that although he was not a deputy from Monsieur de conti, or Monsieur de Beaufort, or Monsieur de Bouillon, or Monsieur d'Elbeuf, or the coadjutor, or Madame de Longueville, or Broussel, or the Parliament, and although he had come on his own private account, he nevertheless had things to say to her majesty of the utmost importance.

The conference being finished, the queen summoned him to her cabinet.

Athos was introduced and announced by name. It was a name that too often had resounded in her majesty's ears and too often vibrated in her heart for Anne of Austria not to recognize it; yet she remained impassive, looking at him with that fixed stare which is tolerated only in women who are queens, either by the power of beauty or by the right of birth.

"It is then a service which you propose to render us, count?" asked Anne of Austria, after a moment's silence.

"Yes, madame, another service," said Athos, shocked that the queen did not seem to recognize him.

Athos had a noble heart, and made, therefore, but a poor courtier.

Anne frowned. Mazarin, who was sitting at a table folding up papers, as if he had only been a secretary of state, looked up.

"Speak," said the queen.

Mazarin turned again to his papers.

"Madame," resumed Athos, "two of my friends, named

D'Artagnan and Monsieur du Vallon, sent to England by the cardinal, suddenly disappeared when they set foot on the shores of France; no one knows what has become of them."

"Well?" said the queen.

"I address myself, therefore, first to the benevolence of your majesty, that I may know what has become of my friends, reserving to myself, if necessary, the right of appealing hereafter to your justice."

"Sir," replied Anne, with a degree of haughtiness which to certain persons became impertinence, "this is the reason that you trouble me in the midst of so many absorbing concerns! an affair for the police! Well, sir, you ought to know that we no longer have a police, since we are no longer at Paris."

"I think your majesty will have no need to apply to the police to know where my friends are, but that if you will deign to interrogate the cardinal he can reply without any further inquiry than into his own recollections."

"But, God forgive me!" cried Anne, with that disdainful curl of the lips peculiar to her, "I believe that you are yourself interrogating."

"Yes, madame, here I have a right to do so, for it concerns Monsieur d'Artagnan — d'Artagnan," he repeated, in such a manner as to bow the regal brow with recollections of the weak and erring woman.

The cardinal saw that it was now high time to come to the assistance of Anne.

"Sir," he said, "I can tell you what is at present unknown to her majesty. These individuals are under arrest. They disobeyed orders."

"I beg of your majesty, then," said Athos, calmly and not replying to Mazarin, "to quash these arrests of Messieurs d'Artagnan and du Vallon."

"What you ask is merely an affair of discipline and does not concern me," said the queen.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan never made such an answer as that when the service of your majesty was concerned," said Athos,

bowing with great dignity. He was going toward the door when Mazarin stopped him.

"You, too, have been in England, sir?" he said, making a sign to the queen, who was evidently going to issue a severe order.

"I was a witness of the last hours of Charles I. Poor king! culpable, at the most, of weakness, how cruelly punished by his subjects! Thrones are at this time shaken and it is to little purpose for devoted hearts to serve the interests of princes. This is the second time that Monsieur d'Artagnan has been in England. He went the first time to save the honor of a great queen; the second, to avert the death of a great king."

"Sir," said Anne to Mazarin, with an accent from which daily habits of dissimulation could not entirely chase the real expression, "see if we can do something for these gentlemen."

"I wish to do, madame, all that your majesty pleases."

"Do what Monsieur de la Fère requests; that is your name, is it not, sir?"

"I have another name, madame—I am called Athos."

"Madame," said Mazarin, with a smile, "you may rest easy; your wishes shall be fulfilled."

"You hear, sir?" said the queen.

"Yes, madame, I expected nothing less from the justice of your majesty. May I not go and see my friends?"

"Yes, sir, you shall see them. But, à propos, you belong to the Fronde, do you not?"

"Madame, I serve the king."

"Yes, in your own way."

"My way is the way of all gentlemen, and I know only one way," answered Athos, haughtily.

"Go, sir, then," said the queen; "you have obtained what you wish and we know all we desire to know."

Scarcely, however, had the tapestry closed behind Athos when she said to Mazarin:

"Cardinal, desire them to arrest that insolent fellow before he leaves the court."

"Your majesty," answered Mazarin, "desires me to do only what I was going to ask you to let me do. These bravoës who resuscitate in our epoch the traditions of another reign are troublesome; since there are two of them already there, let us add a third."

Athos was not altogether the queen's dupe, but he was not a man to run away on suspicion — above all, when distinctly told that he should see his friends again. He waited, then, in the ante-chamber with impatience, till he should be conducted to them.

He walked to the window and looked into the court. He saw the deputation from the Parisians enter it; they were coming to assign the definitive place for the conference and to make their bow to the queen. A very imposing escort awaited them without the gates.

Athos was looking on attentively, when some one touched him softly on the shoulder.

"Ah! Monsieur de Comminges," he said.

"Yes, count, and charged with a commission for which I beg of you to accept my excuses."

"What is it?"

"Be so good as to give me up your sword, count."

Athos smiled and opened the window.

"Aramis!" he cried.

A gentleman turned around. Athos fancied he had seen him among the crowd. It was Aramis. He bowed with great friendship to the count.

"Aramis," cried Athos, "I am arrested."

"Good," replied Aramis, calmly.

"Sir," said Athos, turning to Comminges and giving him politely his sword by the hilt, "here is my sword; have the kindness to keep it safely for me until I quit my prison. I prize it — it was given to my ancestor by King Francis I. In his time they armed gentlemen, not disarmed them. Now, whither do you conduct me?"

"Into my room first," replied Comminges; "the queen will ultimately decide your place of domicile."

Athos followed Comminges without saying a single word.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

CARDINAL MAZARIN AS KING.

THE arrest produced no sensation, indeed was almost unknown, and scarcely interrupted the course of events. To the deputation it was formally announced that the queen would receive it.

Accordingly, it was admitted to the presence of Anne, who, silent and lofty as ever, listened to the speeches and complaints of the deputies; but when they had finished their harangues not one of them could say, so calm remained her face, whether or no she had heard them.

On the other hand, Mazarin, present at that audience, heard very well what those deputies demanded. It was purely and simply his removal, in terms clear and precise.

The discourse being finished, the queen remained silent.

"Gentlemen," said Mazarin, "I join with you in supplicating the queen to put an end to the miseries of her subjects. I have done all in my power to ameliorate them and yet the belief of the public, you say, is that they proceed from me, an unhappy foreigner, who has been unable to please the French. Alas! I have never been understood, and no wonder. I succeeded a man of the most sublime genius that ever upheld the sceptre of France. The memory of Richelieu annihilates me. In vain — were I an ambitious man — should I struggle against such remembrances as he has left; but that I am not ambitious I am going to prove to you. I own myself conquered. I shall obey the wishes of the people. If Paris has injuries to complain of, who has not some wrongs to be redressed? Paris has been sufficiently punished; enough blood has flowed, enough

misery has humbled a town deprived of its king and of justice. 'Tis not for me, a private individual, to disunite a queen from her kingdom. Since you demand my resignation I retire."

"Then," said Aramis, in his neighbor's ear, "the conferences are over. There is nothing to do but to send Monsieur Mazarin to the most distant frontier and to take care that he does not return even by that, nor any other entrance into France."

"One instant, sir," said the man in a gown, whom he addressed; "a plague on't! how fast you go! one may soon see that you're a soldier. There's the article of remunerations and indemnifications to be discussed and set to rights."

"Chancellor," said the queen, turning to Séguier, our old acquaintance, "you will open the conferences. They can take place at Rueil. The cardinal has said several things which have agitated me, therefore I will not speak more fully now. As to his going or staying, I feel too much gratitude to the cardinal not to leave him free in all his actions; he shall do what he wishes to do."

A transient pallor overspread the speaking countenance of the prime minister; he looked at the queen with anxiety. Her face was so passionless, that he, as every one else present, was incapable of reading her thoughts.

"But," added the queen, "in awaiting the cardinal's decision let there be if you please, a reference to the king only."

The deputies bowed and left the room.

"What!" exclaimed the queen, when the last of them had quitted the apartment, "you would yield to these limbs of the law — these advocates?"

"To promote your majesty's welfare, madame," replied Mazarin, fixing his penetrating eyes on the queen, "there is no sacrifice that I would not make."

Anne dropped her head and fell into one of those reveries so habitual with her. A recollection of Athos came into her mind. His fearless deportment, his words, so firm, yet dignified, the shades which by one word he had evoked,

recalled to her the past in all its intoxication of poetry and romance, youth, beauty, the *éclat* of love at twenty years of age, the bloody death of Buckingham, the only man whom she had ever really loved, and the heroism of those obscure champions who had saved her from the double hatred of Richelieu and the king.

Mazarin looked at her, and whilst she deemed herself alone and freed from the world of enemies who sought to spy into her secret thoughts, he read her thoughts in her countenance, as one sees in a transparent lake clouds pass — reflections, like thoughts, of the heavens.

“Must we, then,” asked Anne of Austria, “yield to the storm, buy peace, and patiently and piously await better times?”

Mazarin smiled sarcastically at this speech, which showed that she had taken the minister’s proposal seriously.

Anne’s head was bent down — she had not seen the Italian’s smile; but finding that her question elicited no reply she looked up.

“Well, you do not answer, cardinal; what do you think about it?”

“I am thinking, madame, of the allusion made by that insolent gentleman, whom you have caused to be arrested, to the Duke of Buckingham — to him whom you allowed to be assassinated — to the Duchess de Chevreuse, whom you suffered to be exiled — to the Duc de Beaufort, whom you imprisoned; but if he made allusion to me it was because he is ignorant of the relation in which I stand to you.”

Anne drew up, as she always did, when anything touched her pride. She blushed, and that she might not answer, clasped her beautiful hands till her sharp nails almost pierced them.

“That man has sagacity, honor and wit, not to mention likewise that he is a man of undoubted resolution. You know something about him, do you not, madame? I shall tell him, therefore, and in doing so I shall confer a personal favor on him, how he is mistaken in regard to me.

What is proposed to me would be, in fact, almost an abdication, and an abdication requires reflection."

"An abdication?" repeated Anne; "I thought, sir, that it was kings alone who *abdicated*!"

"Well," replied Mazarin, "and am I not almost a king — king, indeed, of France? Thrown over the foot of the royal bed, my *simar*, madame, looks not unlike the mantle worn by kings."

This was one of the humiliations which Mazarin made Anne undergo more frequently than any other, and one that bowed her head with shame. Queen Elizabeth and Catherine II. of Russia are the only two monarchs of their set on record who were at once sovereigns and lovers. Anne of Austria looked with a sort of terror at the threatening aspect of the cardinal — his physiognomy in such moments was not destitute of a certain grandeur.

"Sir," she replied, "did I not say, and did you not hear me say to those people, that you should do as you pleased?"

"In that case," said Mazarin, "I think it must please me best to remain; not only on account of my own interest, but for your safety."

"Remain, then, sir; nothing can be more agreeable to me; only do not allow me to be insulted."

"You are referring to the demands of the rebels and to the tone in which they stated them? Patience! They have selected a field of battle on which I am an abler general than they — that of a conference. No, we shall beat them by merely temporizing. They want food already. They will be ten times worse off in a week."

"Ah, yes! Good heavens! I know it will end in that way; but it is not they who taunt me with the most wounding reproaches, but ——"

"I understand; you mean to allude to the recollections perpetually revived by these three gentlemen. However, we have them safe in prison, and they are just sufficiently culpable for us to keep them in prison as long as we find it convenient. One only is still not in our power and braves

us. But, devil take him! we shall soon succeed in sending him to join his boon companions. We have accomplished more difficult things than that. In the first place I have as a precaution shut up at Rueil, near me, under my own eyes, within reach of my hand, the two most intractable ones. To-day the third will be there also."

"As long as they are in prison all will be well," said Anne, "but one of these days they will get out."

"Yes, if your majesty releases them."

"Ah!" exclaimed Anne, following the train of her own thoughts on such occasions, "one regrets Paris!"

"Why so?"

"On account of the Bastile, sir, which is so strong and so secure."

"Madame, these conferences will bring us peace; when we have peace we shall regain Paris; with Paris, the Bastile, and our four bullies shall rot therein."

Anne frowned slightly when Mazarin, in taking leave, kissed her hand.

Mazarin, after this half humble, half gallant attention, went away. Anne followed him with her eyes, and as he withdrew, at every step he took, a disdainful smile was seen playing, then gradually burst upon her lips.

"I once," she said, "despised the love of a cardinal who never said '*I shall do,*' but, '*I have done so and so.*' That man knew of retreats more secure than Rueil, darker and more silent even than the Bastile. Degenerate world!"

CHAPTER LXXXII.

P R E C A U T I O N S .

AFTER quitting Anne, Mazarin took the road to Rueil, where he usually resided ; in those times of disturbance he went about with numerous followers and often disguised himself. In military dress he was, indeed, as we have stated, a very handsome man.

In the court of the old Château of Saint Germain he entered his coach, and reached the Seine at Chatou. The prince had supplied him with fifty light horse, not so much by way of guard as to show the deputies how readily the queen's generals dispersed their troops and to prove that they might be safely scattered at pleasure. Athos, on horseback, without his sword and kept in sight by Comminges, followed the cardinal in silence. Grimaud, finding that his master had been arrested, fell back into the ranks near Aramis, without saying a word and as if nothing had happened.

Grimaud had, indeed, during twenty-two years of service, seen his master extricate himself from so many difficulties that nothing less than Athos's imminent death was likely to make him uneasy.

At the branching off of the road toward Paris, Aramis, who had followed in the cardinal's suite, turned back. Mazarin went to the right hand and Aramis could see the prisoner disappear at the turning of the avenue. Athos, at the same moment, moved by a similar impulse, looked back also. The two friends exchanged a simple inclination of the head and Aramis put his finger to his hat, as if to bow, Athos alone comprehending by that signal that he had some project in his head.

Ten minutes afterward Mazarin entered the court of that château which his predecessor had built for him at Rueil ; as he alighted, Comminges approached him.

"My lord," he asked, "where does your eminence wish Monsieur Comte de la Fère to be lodged ?"

"In the pavilion of the orangery, of course, in front of the pavilion where the guard is. I wish every respect to be shown the count, although he is the prisoner of her majesty the queen."

"My lord," answered Comminges, "he begs to be taken to the place where Monsieur d'Artagnan is confined — that is, in the hunting lodge, opposite the orangery."

Mazarin thought for an instant.

Comminges saw that he was undecided.

"'Tis a very strong post," he resumed, "and we have forty good men, tried soldiers, having no connection with Frondeurs nor any interest in the Fronde."

"If we put these three men together, Monsieur Comminges," said Mazarin, "we must double the guard, and we are not rich enough in fighting men to commit such acts of prodigality."

Comminges smiled ; Mazarin read and construed that smile.

"You do not know these men, Monsieur Comminges, but I know them, first personally, also, by hearsay. I sent them to carry aid to King Charles and they performed prodigies to save him ; had it not been for an adverse destiny, that beloved monarch would this day have been among us."

"But since they served your eminence so well, why are they, my lord cardinal, in prison ?"

"In prison ?" said Mazarin ; "and when has Rueil been a prison ?"

"Ever since there were prisoners in it," answered Comminges.

"These gentlemen, Comminges, are not prisoners," returned Mazarin, with his ironical smile, "only guests ; but guests so precious that I have put a grating before each of their win-

dows and bolts to their doors, that they may not refuse to continue my visitors. So much do I esteem them that I am going to make the Comte de la Fère a visit, that I may converse with him *tête-à-tête*, and that we may not be disturbed at our interview you must conduct him, as I said before, to the pavilion of the orangery; that, you know, is my daily promenade. Well, while taking my walk I will call on him and we will talk. Though he professes to be my enemy I have sympathy for him, and if he is reasonable perhaps we shall arrange matters."

Comminges bowed, and returned to Athos, who was awaiting with apparent calmness, but with real anxiety, the result of the interview.

"Well?" he said to the lieutenant.

"Sir," replied Comminges, "it seems that it is impossible."

"Monsieur de Comminges," said Athos, "I have been a soldier all my life and I know the force of orders; but outside your orders there is a service you can render me."

"I will do it with all my heart," said Comminges; "for I know who you are and what service you once performed for her majesty; I know, too, how dear to you is the young man who came so valiantly to my aid when that old rogue of a Broussel was arrested. I am entirely at your service, except only for my orders."

"Thank you, sir; what I am about to ask will not compromise you in any degree."

"If it should even compromise me a little," said Monsieur de Comminges, with a smile, "still make your demand. I don't like Mazarin any better than you do. I serve the queen and that draws me naturally into the service of the cardinal; but I serve the one with joy and the other against my will. Speak, then, I beg of you; I wait and listen."

"Since there is no harm," said Athos, "in my knowing that D'Artagnan is here, I presume there will be none in his knowing that I am here."

"I have received no orders on that point."

"Well, then, do me the kindness to give him my regards and tell him that I am his neighbor. Tell him also what you have just told me — that Mazarin has placed me in the pavilion of the orangery in order to make me a visit, and assure him that I shall take advantage of this honor he proposes to accord to me to obtain from him some amelioration of our captivity."

"Which cannot last," interrupted Comminges; "the cardinal said so; there is no prison here."

"But there are oubliettes!" replied Athos, smiling.

"Oh! that's a different thing; yes, I know there are traditions of that sort," said Comminges. "It was in the time of the other cardinal, who was a great nobleman; but our Mazarin — impossible! an Italian adventurer would not dare to go such lengths with such men as ourselves. Oubliettes are employed as a means of kingly vengeance and a low-born fellow such as he is would not have recourse to them. Your arrest is known, that of your friends will soon be known; and all the nobility of France would demand an explanation of your disappearance. No, no, be easy on that score. I will, however, inform Monsieur d'Artagnan of your arrival here."

Comminges then led the count to a room on the ground floor of a pavilion, at the end of the orangery. They passed through a courtyard as they went, full of soldiers and courtiers. In the centre of this court, in the form of a horseshoe, were the buildings occupied by Mazarin, and at each wing the pavilion (or smaller building), where D'Artagnan was confined, and that, level with the orangery, where Athos was to be. From the ends of these two wings extended the park.

Athos, when he reached his appointed room, observed through the gratings of his window, walls and roofs; and was told, on inquiry, by Comminges, that he was looking on the back of the pavilion where D'Artagnan was confined.

"Yes, 'tis too true," said Comminges, "'tis almost a prison; but what a singular fancy this is of yours, count—

you, who are the very flower of our nobility — to squander your valor and loyalty amongst these upstarts, the Frondist! Really, count, if ever I thought that I had a friend in the ranks of the royal army, it was you. A Frondeur! you, the Comte de la Fère, on the side of Broussel, Blancmesnil and Viole! For shame! you, a Frondeur!"

"On my word of honor," said Athos, "one must be either a Mazarinist or a Frondeur. For a long time I had these words whispered in my ears, and I chose the latter; at any rate, it is a French word. And now, I am a Frondeur — not of Broussel's party, nor of Blancmesnil's, nor am I with Viole; but with the Duc de Beaufort, the Ducs de Bouillon and d'Elbeuf; with princes, not with presidents, councillors and low-born lawyers. Besides, what a charming outlook it would have been to serve the cardinal! Look at that wall — without a single window — which tells you fine things about Mazarin's gratitude!"

"Yes," replied De Comminges, "more especially if it could reveal how Monsieur d'Artagnan for this last week has been anathematizing him."

"Poor D'Artagnan," said Athos, with the charming melancholy that was one of the traits of his character, "so brave, so good, so terrible to the enemies of those he loves. You have two unruly prisoners there, sir."

"Unruly," Comminges smiled; "you wish to terrify me, I suppose. When he came here, Monsieur d'Artagnan provoked and braved the soldiers and inferior officers, in order, I suppose, to have his sword back. That mood lasted some time; but now he's as gentle as a lamb and sings Gascon songs, which make one die of laughing."

"And Du Vallon?" asked Athos.

"Ah, he's quite another sort of person — a formidable gentleman, indeed. The first day he broke all the doors in with a single push of his shoulder; and I expected to see him leave Rueil in the same way as Samson left Gaza. But his temper cooled down, like his friend's; he not only gets used to his captivity, but jokes about it."

"So much the better," said Athos.

"Do you think anything else was to be expected of them?" asked Comminges, who, putting together what Mazarin had said of his prisoners and what the Comte de la Fère had said, began to feel a degree of uneasiness.

Athos, on the other hand, reflected that this recent gentleness of his friends most certainly arose from some plan formed by D'Artagnan. Unwilling to injure them by praising them too highly, he replied: "They? They are two hotheads—the one a Gascon, the other from Picardy; both are easily excited, but they quiet down immediately. You have had a proof of that in what you have just related to me."

This, too, was the opinion of Comminges, who withdrew somewhat reassured. Athos remained alone in the vast chamber, where, according to the cardinal's directions, he was treated with all the courtesy due to a nobleman. He awaited Mazarin's promised visit to get some light on his present situation.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

STRENGTH AND SAGACITY.

Now let us pass the orangery to the hunting lodge. At the extremity of the courtyard, where, close to a portico formed of Ionic columns, were the dog kennels, rose an oblong building, the pavilion of the orangery, a half circle, inclosing the court of honor. It was in this pavilion, on the ground floor, that D'Artagnan and Porthos were confined, suffering interminable hours of imprisonment in a manner suitable to each different temperament.

D'Artagnan was pacing to and fro like a caged tiger; with dilated eyes, growling as he paced along by the bars of a window looking upon the yard of servant's offices.

Porthos was ruminating over an excellent dinner he had just demolished.

The one seemed to be deprived of reason, yet he was meditating. The other seemed to meditate, yet he was more than half asleep. But his sleep was a nightmare, which might be guessed by the incoherent manner in which he sometimes snored and sometimes snorted.

"Look," said D'Artagnan, "day is declining. It must be nearly four o'clock. We have been in this place nearly eighty-three hours."

"Hem!" muttered Porthos, with a kind of pretense of answering.

"Did you hear, eternal sleeper?" cried D'Artagnan, irritated that any one could doze during the day, when he had the greatest difficulty in sleeping during the night.

"What?" said Porthos.

"I say we have been here eighty-three hours."

"'Tis your fault," answered Porthos.

"How, my fault?"

"Yes, I offered you escape."

"By pulling out a bar and pushing down a door?"

"Certainly."

"Porthos, men like us can't go out from here purely and simply."

"Faith!" said Porthos, "as for me, I could go out with that purity and that simplicity which it seems to me you despise too much."

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders.

"And besides," he said, "going out of this chamber isn't all."

"Dear friend," said Porthos, "you appear to be in a somewhat better humor to-day than you were yesterday. Explain to me why going out of this chamber isn't everything."

"Because, having neither arms nor password, we shouldn't take fifty steps in the court without knocking against a sentinel."

"Very well," said Porthos, "we will kill the sentinel and we shall have his arms."

"Yes; but before we can kill him — and he will be hard to kill, that Swiss — he will shriek out and the whole picket will come, and we shall be taken like foxes, we, who are lions, and thrown into some dungeon, where we shall not even have the consolation of seeing this frightful gray sky of Rueil, which no more resembles the sky of Tarbes than the moon is like the sun. Lack-a-day! if we only had some one to instruct us about the physical and moral topography of this castle. Ah! when one thinks that for twenty years, during which time I did not know what to do with myself, it never occurred to me to come to study Rueil."

"What difference does that make?" said Porthos. "We shall go out all the same."

"Do you know, my dear fellow, why master pastrycooks never work with their hands?"

"No," said Porthos, "but I should be glad to be informed."

"It is because in the presence of their pupils they fear that some of their tarts or creams may turn out badly cooked."

"What then?"

"Why, then they would be laughed at, and a master pastrycook must never be laughed at."

"And what have master pastrycooks to do with us?"

"We ought, in our adventures, never to be defeated or give any one a chance to laugh at us. In England, lately, we failed, we were beaten, and that is a blemish on our reputation."

"By whom, then, were we beaten?" asked Porthos.

"By Mordaunt."

"Yes, but we have drowned Monsieur Mordaunt."

"That is true and that will redeem us a little in the eyes of posterity, if posterity ever looks at us. But listen, Porthos: though Monsieur Mordaunt was a man not to be despised, Mazarin is not less strong than he, and we shall not easily succeed in drowning him. We must, therefore, watch and play a close game; for," he added with a sigh, "we two are equal, perhaps, to eight others; but we are not equal to the four that you know of."

"That is true," said Porthos, echoing D'Artagnan's sigh.

"Well, Porthos, follow my example; walk back and forth till some news of our friends reaches us or till we are visited by a good idea. But don't sleep as you do all the time; nothing dulls the intellect like sleep. As to what may lie before us, it is perhaps less serious than we at first thought. I don't believe that Monsieur de Mazarin thinks of cutting off our heads, for heads are not taken off without previous trial; a trial would make a noise and a noise would get the attention of our friends, who would check the operations of Monsieur de Mazarin."

"How well you reason!" said Porthos, admiringly.

"Well, yes, pretty well," replied D'Artagnan; "and besides, you see, if they put us on trial, if they cut off our heads, they must meanwhile either keep us here or transfer us elsewhere."

"Yes, that is inevitable," said Porthos.

"Well, it is impossible but that Master Aramis, that keen-scented bloodhound, and Athos, that wise and prudent nobleman, will discover our retreat. Then, believe me, it will be time to act."

"Yes, we will wait. We can wait the more contentedly, that it is not absolutely bad here, but for one thing, at least."

"What is that?"

"Did you observe, D'Artagnan, that three days running they have brought us braised mutton?"

"No; but if it occurs a fourth time I shall complain of it, so never mind."

"And then I feel the loss of my house; 'tis a long time since I visited my castles."

"Forget them for a time; we shall return to them, unless Mazarin razes them to the ground."

"Do you think that likely?"

"No; the *other* cardinal would have done so, but this one is too mean a fellow to risk it."

"You reconcile me, D'Artagnan."

"Well, then, assume a cheerful manner, as I do; we must joke with the guards, we must gain the good-will of the soldiers, since we can't corrupt them. Try, Porthos, to please them more than you are wont to do when they are under our windows. Thus far you have done nothing but show them your fist; and the more respectable your fist is, Porthos, the less attractive it is. Ah, I would give much to have five hundred louis, only."

"So would I," said Porthos, unwilling to be behind D'Artagnan in generosity; "I would give as much as a hundred pistoles."

The two prisoners were at this point of their conversation when Comminges entered, preceded by a sergeant and two men, who brought supper in a basket with two handles, filled with basins and plates.

"What!" exclaimed Porthos, "mutton again?"

"My dear Monsieur de Comminges," said D'Artagnan, "you will find that my friend, Monsieur du Vallon, will go to the most fatal lengths if Cardinal Mazarin continues to provide us with this sort of meat; mutton every day."

"I declare," said Porthos, "I shall eat nothing if they do not take it away."

"Remove the mutton," cried Comminges; "I wish Monsieur du Vallon to sup well, more especially as I have news to give him that will improve his appetite."

"Is Mazarin dead?" asked Porthos.

"No; I am sorry to tell you he is perfectly well."

"So much the worse," said Porthos.

"What is that news?" asked D'Artagnan. "News in prison is a fruit so rare that I trust, Monsieur de Comminges, you will excuse my impatience—the more eager since you have given us to understand that the news is good."

"Should you be glad to hear that the Comte de la Fère is well?" asked De Comminges.

D'Artagnan's penetrating gray eyes were opened to the utmost.

"Glad!" he cried; "I should be more than glad! Happy—beyond measure!"

"Well, I am desired by him to give you his compliments and to say that he is in good health."

D'Artagnan almost leaped with joy. A quick glance conveyed his thought to Porthos: "If Athos knows where we are, if he opens communication with us, before long Athos will act."

Porthos was not very quick to understand the language of glances, but now since the name of Athos had suggested to him the same idea, he understood.

"Do you say," asked the Gascon, timidly, "that the Comte de la Fère has commissioned you to give his compliments to Monsieur du Vallon and myself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you have seen him?"

"Certainly I have."

"Where? if I may ask without indiscretion."

"Near here," replied De Comminges, smiling; "so near that if the windows which look on the orangery were not stopped up you could see him from where you are."

"He is wandering about the environs of the castle," thought D'Artagnan. Then he said aloud:

"You met him, I dare say, in the park — hunting, perhaps?"

"No; nearer, nearer still. Look, behind this wall," said De Comminges, knocking against the wall.

"Behind this wall? What is there, then, behind this wall? I was brought here by night, so devil take me if I know where I am."

"Well," said Comminges, "suppose one thing."

"I will suppose anything you please."

"Suppose there were a window in this wall."

"Well?"

"From that window you would see Monsieur de la Fère at his."

"The count, then, is in the château?"

"Yes."

"For what reason?"

"The same as yourself."

"Athos — a prisoner?"

"You know well," replied De Comminges, "that there are no prisoners at Rueil, because there is no prison."

"Don't let us play upon words, sir. Athos has been arrested."

"Yesterday, at Saint Germain, as he came out from the presence of the queen."

The arms of D'Artagnan fell powerless by his side. One might have supposed him thunderstruck; a paleness ran like a cloud over his dark skin, but disappeared immediately.

"A prisoner?" he reiterated.

"A prisoner," repeated Porthos, quite dejected.

Suddenly D'Artagnan looked up and in his eyes there

was a gleam which scarcely even Porthos observed ; but it died away and he appeared more sorrowful than before.

"Come, come," said Comminges, who, since D'Artagnan, on the day of Broussel's arrest, had saved him from the hands of the Parisians, had entertained a real affection for him, "don't be unhappy ; I never thought of bringing you bad news. Laugh at the chance which has brought your friend near to you and Monsieur du Vallon, instead of being in the depths of despair about it."

But D'Artagnan was still in a desponding mood.

"And how did he look ?" asked Porthos, who, perceiving that D'Artagnan had allowed the conversation to drop, profited by it to put in a word or two.

"Very well, indeed, sir," replied Comminges ; "at first, like you, he seemed distressed ; but when he heard that the cardinal was going to pay him a visit this very evening ——"

"Ah !" cried D'Artagnan ; "the cardinal is about to visit the Comte de la Fère ?"

"Yes ; and the count desired me to tell you that he should take advantage of this visit to plead for you and for himself."

"Ah ! our dear count !" said D'Artagnan.

"A fine thing, indeed !" grunted Porthos. "A great favor ! Zounds ! Monsieur the Comte de la Fère, whose family is allied to the Montmorency and the Rohan, is easily the equal of Monsieur de Mazarin."

"No matter," said D'Artagnan, in his most wheedling tone. "On reflection, my dear Du Vallon, it is a great honor for the Comte de la Fère, and gives good reason to hope. In fact, it seems to me so great an honor for a prisoner that I think Monsieur de Comminges must be mistaken."

"What ? I am mistaken ?"

"Monsieur de Mazarin will not come to visit the Comte de la Fère, but the Comte de la Fère will be sent for to visit him."

"No, no, no," said Comminges, who made a point of hav-

ing the facts appear exactly as they were, "I clearly understood what the cardinal said to me. He will come and visit the Comte de la Fère."

D'Artagnan tried to gather from the expression of his eyes whether Porthos understood the importance of that visit, but Porthos did not even look toward him.

"It is, then, the cardinal's custom to walk in his orangery?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Every evening he shuts himself in there. That, it seems, is where he meditates on state affairs."

"In that case," said D'Artagnan, "I begin to believe that Monsieur de la Fère will receive the visit of his eminence; he will, of course, have an escort."

"Yes — two soldiers."

"And will he talk thus of affairs in presence of two strangers?"

"The soldiers are Swiss, who understand only German. Besides, according to all probability they will wait at the door."

D'Artagnan made a violent effort over himself to keep his face from being too expressive.

"Let the cardinal take care of going alone to visit the Comte de la Fère," said D'Artagnan; "for the count must be furious."

Comminges began to laugh. "Oh, oh! why, really, one would say that you four were anthropophagi! The count is an affable man; besides, he is unarmed; at the first word from his eminence the two soldiers about him would run to his assistance."

"Two soldiers," said D'Artagnan, seeming to remember something, "two soldiers, yes; that, then, is why I hear two men called every evening and see them walking, sometimes for half an hour, under my window."

"That is it; they are waiting for the cardinal, or rather for Bernouin, who comes to call them when the cardinal goes out."

"Fine looking men, upon my word!" said D'Artagnan.

"They belong to the regiment that was at Lens, which the prince assigned to the cardinal."

"Ah, monsieur," said D'Artagnan, as if to sum up in a word all that conversation, "if only his eminence would relent and grant to Monsieur de la Fère our liberty."

"I wish it with all my heart," said Comminges.

"Then, if he should forget that visit, you would find no inconvenience in reminding him of it?"

"Not at all."

"Ah, that gives me more confidence."

This skillful turn of the conversation would have seemed a sublime manœuvre to any one who could have read the Gascon's soul.

"Now," said D'Artagnan, "I've one last favor to ask of you, Monsieur de Comminges."

"At your service, sir."

"You will see the count again?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Will you remember us to him and ask him to solicit for me the same favor that he will have obtained?"

"You want the cardinal to come here?"

"No; I know my place and am not so presumptuous. Let his eminence do me the honor to give me a hearing; that is all I want."

"Oh!" muttered Porthos, shaking his head; "never should I have thought this of *him*! How misfortune humbles a man!"

"I promise you it shall be done," answered De Comminges.

"Tell the count that I am well; that you found me sad, but resigned."

"I am pleased, sir, to hear that."

"And the same, also, for Monsieur du Vallon ——"

"Not for me!" cried Porthos; "I am not by any means resigned."

"But you will be resigned, my friend."

"Never!"

"He will become so, monsieur; I know him better than he knows himself. Be silent, dear Du Vallon, and resign yourself."

"Adieu, gentlemen," said De Comminges; "sleep well!"

"We will try."

De Comminges went away, D'Artagnan remaining apparently in the same attitude of humble resignation; but scarcely had he departed when he turned and clasped Porthos in his arms with an expression not to be doubted.

"Oh!" cried Porthos; "what's the matter now? Have you gone mad, my dear friend?"

"What is the matter?" returned D'Artagnan; "we are saved!"

"I don't see that at all," answered Porthos. "I think we are all taken prisoners, except Aramis, and that our chances of getting out are lessened since one more of us is caught in Mazarin's mousetrap."

"Which is far too strong for two of us, but not strong enough for three of us," returned D'Artagnan.

"I don't understand," said Porthos.

"Never mind; let's sit down to table and take something to strengthen us for the night."

"What are we to do, then, to-night?"

"To travel — perhaps."

"But ——"

"Sit down, dear friend, to table. When one is eating, ideas flow easily. After supper, when they are perfected, I will communicate my plans to you."

So Porthos sat down to table without another word and ate with an appetite that did honor to the confidence that was ever inspired in him by D'Artagnan's inventive imagination.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

STRENGTH AND SAGACITY — CONTINUED.

SUPPER was eaten in silence, but not in sadness; for from time to time one of those sweet smiles which were habitual to him in moments of good-humor illumined the face of D'Artagnan. Not a scintilla of these was lost on Porthos; and at every one he uttered an exclamation which betrayed to his friend that he had not lost sight of the idea which possessed his brain.

At dessert D'Artagnan reposed in his chair, crossed one leg over the other and lounged about like a man perfectly at his ease.

Porthos rested his chin on his hands, placed his elbows on the table and looked at D'Artagnan with an expression of confidence which imparted to that colossus an admirable appearance of good-fellowship.

"Well?" said D'Artagnan, at last.

"Well!" repeated Porthos.

"You were saying, my dear friend ——"

"No; I said nothing."

"Yes, you were saying you wished to leave this place."

"Ah, indeed! the will was never wanting."

"To get away you would not mind, you added, knocking down a door or a wall."

"'Tis true — I said so, and I say it again."

"And I answered you, Porthos, that it was not a good plan; that we couldn't go a hundred steps without being recaptured, because we were without clothes to disguise ourselves and arms to defend ourselves."

"That is true; we should need clothes and arms."

"Well," said D'Artagnan, rising, "we have them, friend Porthos, and even something better."

"Bah!" said Porthos, looking around.

"Useless to look; everything will come to us when wanted. At about what time did we see the two Swiss guards walking yesterday?"

"An hour after sunset."

"If they go out to-day as they did yesterday we shall have the honor, then, of seeing them in half an hour?"

"In a quarter of an hour at most."

"Your arm is still strong enough, is it not, Porthos?"

Porthos unbuttoned his sleeve, raised his shirt and looked complacently on his strong arm, as large as the leg of any ordinary man.

"Yes, indeed," said he, "I believe so."

"So that you could without trouble convert these tongs into a hoop and yonder shovel into a corkscrew?"

"Certainly." And the giant took up these two articles, and without any apparent effort produced in them the metamorphoses suggested by his companion.

"There!" he cried.

"Capital!" exclaimed the Gascon. "Really, Porthos, you are a gifted individual!"

"I have heard speak," said Porthos, "of a certain Milo of Crotona, who performed wonderful feats, such as binding his forehead with a cord and bursting it—of killing an ox with a blow of his fist and carrying it home on his shoulders, *et cetera*. I used to learn all these feats by heart yonder, down at Pierrefonds, and I have done all that he did except breaking a cord by the corrugation of my temples."

"Because your strength is not in your head, Porthos," said his friend.

"No; it is in my arms and shoulders," answered Porthos with gratified *naïveté*.

"Well, my dear friend, let us approach the window and there you can match your strength against that of an iron bar."

Porthos went to the window, took a bar in his hands, clung to it and bent it like a bow ; so that the two ends came out of the sockets of stone in which for thirty years they had been fixed.

"Well! friend, the cardinal, although such a genius, could never have done that."

"Shall I take out any more of them?" asked Porthos.

"No; that is sufficient; a man can pass through that."

Porthos tried, and passed the upper portion of his body through.

"Yes," he said.

"Now pass your arm through this opening."

"Why?"

"You will know presently — pass it."

Porthos obeyed with military promptness and passed his arm through the opening.

"Admirable!" said D'Artagnan.

"The scheme goes forward, it seems."

"On wheels, dear friend."

"Good! What shall I do now?"

"Nothing."

"It is finished, then?"

"No, not yet."

"I should like to understand," said Porthos.

"Listen, my dear friend; in two words you will know all. The door of the guardhouse opens, as you see."

"Yes, I see."

"They are about to send into our court, which Monsieur de Mazarin crosses on his way to the orangery, the two guards who attend him."

"There they are, coming out."

"If only they close the guardhouse door! Good! They close it."

"What, then?"

"Silence! They may hear us."

"I don't understand it at all."

"As you execute you will understand."

"And yet I should have preferred ——"

"You will have the pleasure of the surprise."

"Ah, that is true."

"Hush!"

Porthos remained silent and motionless.

In fact, the two soldiers advanced on the side where the window was, rubbing their hands, for it was cold, it being the month of February.

At this moment the door of the guardhouse was opened and one of the soldiers was summoned away.

"Now," said D'Artagnan, "I am going to call this soldier and talk to him. Don't lose a word of what I'm going to say to you, Porthos. Everything lies in the execution."

"Good, the execution of plots is my *forte*."

"I know it well. I depend on you. Look, I shall turn to the left, so that the soldier will be at your right, as soon as he mounts on the bench to talk to us."

"But supposing he doesn't mount?"

"He will; rely upon it. As soon as you see him get up, stretch out your arm and seize him by the neck. Then, raising him up as Tobit raised the fish by the gills, you must pull him into the room, taking care to squeeze him so tight that he can't cry out."

"Oh!" said Porthos. "Suppose I happen to strangle him?"

"To be sure there would only be a Swiss the less in the world; but you will not do so, I hope. Lay him down here; we'll gag him and tie him — no matter where — somewhere. So we shall get from him one uniform and a sword."

"Marvelous!" exclaimed Porthos, looking at the Gascon with the most profound admiration.

"Pooh!" replied D'Artagnan.

"Yes," said Porthos, recollecting himself, "but one uniform and one sword will not suffice for two."

"Well; but there's his comrade."

"True," said Porthos.

"Therefore, when I cough, stretch out your arm."

"Good!"

The two friends then placed themselves as they had agreed, Porthos being completely hidden in an angle of the window.

"Good-evening, comrade," said D'Artagnan in his most fascinating voice and manner.

"Good-evening, sir," answered the soldier, in a strong provincial accent.

"'Tis not too warm to walk," resumed D'Artagnan.

"No, sir."

"And I think a glass of wine will not be disagreeable to you?"

"A glass of wine will be extremely welcome."

"The fish bites — the fish bites!" whispered the Gascon to Porthos.

"I understand," said Porthos.

"A bottle, perhaps?"

"A whole bottle? Yes, sir."

"A whole bottle, if you will drink my health."

"Willingly," answered the soldier.

"Come, then, and take it, friend," said the Gascon.

"With all my heart. How convenient that there's a bench here. Egad! one would think it had been placed here on purpose."

"Get on it; that's it, friend."

And D'Artagnan coughed.

That instant the arm of Porthos fell. His hand of iron grasped, quick as lightning, firm as a pair of blacksmith's pincers, the soldier's throat. He raised him, almost stifling him as he drew him through the aperture, at the risk of flaying him in the passage. He then laid him down on the floor, where D'Artagnan, after giving him just time enough to draw his breath, gagged him with his long scarf; and the moment he had done so, began to undress him with the promptitude and dexterity of a man who had learned his business on the field of battle. Then the soldier, gagged

and bound, was placed upon the hearth, the fire of which had been previously extinguished by the two friends.

"Here's a sword and a dress," said Porthos.

"I take them," said D'Artagnan, "for myself. If you want another uniform and sword you must play the same trick over again. Stop! I see the other soldier issue from the guardroom and come toward us."

"I think," replied Porthos, "it would be imprudent to attempt the same manœuvre again; it is said that no man can succeed twice in the same way, and a failure would be ruinous. No; I will go down, seize the man unawares and bring him to you ready gagged."

"That is better," said the Gascon.

"Be ready," said Porthos, as he slipped through the opening.

He did as he said. Porthos seized his opportunity, caught the next soldier by his neck, gagged him and pushed him like a mummy through the bars into the room, and entered after him. Then they undressed him as they had done the first, laid him on their bed and bound him with the straps which composed the bed—the bedstead being of oak. This operation proved as great a success as the first.

"There," said D'Artagnan, "this is capital! Now let me try on the dress of yonder chap. Porthos, I doubt if you can wear it; but should it be too tight, never mind, you can wear the breastplate and the hat with the red feathers."

It happened, however, that the second soldier was a Swiss of gigantic proportions, so, save that some few of the seams split, his uniform fitted Porthos perfectly.

They then dressed themselves.

"'Tis done!" they both exclaimed at once. "As to you, comrades," they said to the men, "nothing will happen to you if you are discreet; but if you stir you are dead men."

The soldiers were complaisant; they had found the grasp of Porthos pretty powerful and that it was no joke to fight against it.

"Now," said D'Artagnan, "you wouldn't be sorry to understand the plot, would you, Porthos?"

"Well, no, not very."

"Well, then, we shall go down into the court."

"Yes."

"We shall take the place of those two fellows."

"Well?"

"We will walk back and forth."

"That's a good idea, for it isn't warm."

"In a moment the *valet-de-chambre* will call the guard, as he did yesterday and the day before."

"And we shall answer?"

"No, on the contrary, we shall not answer."

"As you please; I don't insist on answering."

"We will not answer, then; we will simply settle our hats on our heads and we will escort his eminence."

"Where shall we escort him?"

"Where he is going—to visit Athos. Do you think Athos will be sorry to see us?"

"Oh!" cried Porthos, "oh! I understand."

"Wait a little, Porthos, before crying out; for, on my word, you haven't reached the end," said the Gascon, in a jesting tone.

"What is to happen?" said Porthos.

"Follow me," replied D'Artagnan. "The man who lives to see shall see."

And slipping through the aperture, he alighted in the court. Porthos followed him by the same road, but with more difficulty and less diligence. They could hear the two soldiers shivering with fear, as they lay bound in the chamber.

Scarcely had the two Frenchmen touched the ground when a door opened and the voice of the *valet-de-chambre* called out:

"Make ready!"

At the same moment the guardhouse was opened and a voice called out:

"La Bruyère and Du Barthois! March!"

"It seems that I am named La Bruyère," remarked D'Artagnan.

"And I, Du Barthetais," added Porthos.

"Where are you?" asked the *valet-de-chambre*, whose eyes, dazzled by the light, could not clearly distinguish our heroes in the gloom.

"Here we are," said the Gascon.

"What say you to that, Monsieur du Vallon?" he added in a low tone to Porthos.

"If it but lasts, most capital," responded Porthos.

These two newly enlisted soldiers marched gravely after the *valet-de-chambre*, who opened the door of the vestibule, then another, which seemed to be that of a waiting-room, and showing them two stools:

"Your orders are very simple," he said; "don't allow anybody, except one person, to enter here. Do you hear — not a single creature! Obey that person implicitly. On your return you cannot make a mistake. You have only to wait here till I release you."

D'Artagnan was known to this *valet-de-chambre*, who was no other than Bernouin, and he had during the last six or eight months introduced the Gascon a dozen times to the cardinal. The Gascon, therefore, instead of answering, growled out "Ja! Ja!" in the most German and the least Gascon accent possible.

As for Porthos, on whom D'Artagnan had impressed the necessity of absolute silence and who did not even now begin to comprehend the scheme of his friend, which was to follow Mazarin in his visit to Athos, he was simply mute. All that he was allowed to say, in case of emergencies, was the proverbial *Der Teufel!*

Bernouin shut the door and went away. When Porthos heard the key turn in the lock he began to be alarmed, lest they should only have exchanged one prison for another.

"Porthos, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "don't distrust Providence! Let me meditate and consider."

"Meditate and consider as much as you like," replied Porthos, who was now quite out of humor at seeing things take this turn.

"We have walked eight paces," whispered D'Artagnan, "and gone up six steps, so hereabouts is the pavilion called the pavilion of the orangery. The Comte de la Fère cannot be far off, only the doors are locked."

"That is a slight difficulty," said Porthos, "and a good push with the shoulders——"

"For God's sake, Porthos, my friend, reserve your feats of strength, or they will not have, when needed, the honor they deserve. Have you not heard that some one is coming here?"

"Yes."

"Well, that some one will open the doors."

"But, my dear fellow, if that some one recognizes us, if that some one cries out, we are lost; for you don't propose, I imagine, that I shall kill that man of the church. That might do if we were dealing with Englishmen or Germans."

"Oh, may God keep me from it, and you, too!" said D'Artagnan. "The young king, would, perhaps, show us some gratitude; but the queen would never forgive us, and it is she whom we have to consider. And then, besides, the useless blood! never! no, never! I have my plan; let me carry it out and we shall laugh."

"So much the better," said Porthos; "I feel some need of it."

"Hush!" said D'Artagnan; "the some one is coming."

The sound of a light step was heard in the vestibule. The hinges of the door creaked and a man appeared in the dress of a cavalier, wrapped in a brown cloak, with a lantern in one hand and a large beaver hat pulled down over his eyes.

Porthos effaced himself against the wall, but he could not render himself invisible; and the man in the cloak said to him, giving him his lantern:

"Light the lamp which hangs from the ceiling."

Then addressing D'Artagnan:

"You know the watchword?" he said.

"Ja!" replied the Gascon, determined to confine himself to this specimen of the German tongue.

"*Tedesco!*" answered the cavalier; "*va bene.*"

And advancing toward the door opposite to that by which he came in, he opened it and disappeared behind it, shutting it as he went.

"Now," asked Porthos, "what are we to do?"

"Now we shall make use of your shoulder, friend Porthos, if this door proves to be locked. Everything in its proper time, and all comes right to those who know how to wait patiently. But first barricade the first door well; then we will follow yonder cavalier."

The two friends set to work and crowded the space before the door with all the furniture in the room, as as not only to make the passage impassable, but so to block the door that by no means could it open inward.

"There!" said D'Artagnan, "we can't be overtaken. Come! forward!"

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE OUBLIETTES OF CARDINAL MAZARIN.

At first, on arriving at the door through which Mazarin had passed, D'Artagnan tried in vain to open it, but on the powerful shoulder of Porthos being applied to one of the panels, which gave way, D'Artagnan introduced the point of his sword between the bolt and the staple of the lock. The bolt gave way and the door opened.

"As I told you, everything can be attained, Porthos, women and doors, by proceeding with gentleness."

"You're a great moralist, and that's the fact," said Porthos.

They entered; behind a glass window, by the light of the cardinal's lantern, which had been placed on the floor in the midst of the gallery, they saw the orange and pomegranate trees of the Castle of Rueil, in long lines, forming one great alley and two smaller side alleys.

"No cardinal!" said D'Artagnan, "but only his lantern; where the devil, then, is *he*?"

Exploring, however, one of the side wings of the gallery, after making a sign to Porthos to explore the other, he saw, all at once, at his left, a tub containing an orange tree, which had been pushed out of its place and in its place an open aperture.

Ten men would have found difficulty in moving that tub, but by some mechanical contrivance it had turned with the flagstone on which it rested.

D'Artagnan, as we have said, perceived a hole in that place and in this hole the steps of a winding staircase.

He called Porthos to look at it.

"Were our object money only," he said, "we should be rich directly."

"How's that?"

"Don't you understand, Porthos? At the bottom of that staircase lies, probably, the cardinal's treasury, of which folk tell such wonders; and we should only have to descend, empty a chest, shut the cardinal up in it, double lock it, go away, carrying off as much gold as we could, put back this orange-tree over the place, and no one in the world would ever ask us where our fortune came from — not even the cardinal."

"It would be a happy hit for clowns to make, but as it seems to be unworthy of two gentlemen ——" said Porthos.

"So I think; and therefore I said, 'Were our object money only;' but we want something else," replied the Gascon.

At the same moment, whilst D'Artagnan was leaning over the aperture to listen, a metallic sound, as if some one was moving a bag of gold, struck on his ear; he started; instantly afterward a door opened and a light played upon the staircase.

Mazarin had left his lamp in the gallery to make people believe that he was walking about, but he had with him a waxlight, to help him to explore his mysterious strong box.

"Faith," he said, in Italian, as he was reascending the steps and looking at a bag of reals, "faith, there's enough to pay five councillors of parliament, and two generals in Paris. I am a great captain — that I am! but I make war in my own way."

The two friends were crouching down, meantime, behind a tub in the side alley.

Mazarin came within three steps of D'Artagnan and pushed a spring in the wall; the slab turned and the orange tree resumed its place.

Then the cardinal put out the waxlight, slipped it into his pocket, and taking up the lantern: "Now," he said, "for Monsieur de la Fère."

"Very good," thought D'Artagnan, "'tis our road likewise; we will go together."

All three set off on their walk, Mazarin taking the middle alley and the friends the side ones.

The cardinal reached a second door without perceiving he was being followed; the sand with which the alleys were covered deadened the sound of footsteps.

He then turned to the left, down a corridor which had escaped the attention of the two friends, but as he opened the door he paused, as if in thought.

"Ah! *Diavolo!*" he exclaimed, "I forgot the recommendation of De Comminges, who advised me to take a guard and place it at this door, in order not to put myself at the mercy of that four-headed combination of devils." And with a movement of impatience he turned to retrace his steps.

"Do not give yourself the trouble, my lord," said D'Artagnan, with his right foot forward, his beaver in his hand, a smile on his face; "we have followed your eminence step by step and here we are."

"Yes — *here we are,*" said Porthos.

And he made the same friendly salute as D'Artagnan.

Mazarin gazed at each of them with an affrighted stare, recognized them, and let drop his lantern, uttering a cry of terror.

D'Artagnan picked it up; by good luck it had not been extinguished.

"Oh, what imprudence, my lord," said D'Artagnan; "'tis not good to go about just here without a light. Your eminence might knock against something, or fall into a hole."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!" muttered Mazarin, unable to recover from his astonishment.

"Yes, my lord, it is I. I have the honor to present to you Monsieur du Vallon, that excellent friend of mine, in whom your eminence had the kindness to interest yourself formerly."

And D'Artagnan held the lamp before the merry face of

Porthos, who now began to comprehend the affair and be very proud of the whole undertaking.

"You were going to visit Monsieur de la Fère?" said D'Artagnan. "Don't let us disarrange your eminence. Be so good as to show us the way and we will follow you."

Mazarin was by degrees recovering his senses.

"Have you been long in the orangery?" he asked in a trembling voice, remembering the visit he had been paying to his treasury.

Porthos opened his mouth to reply; D'Artagnan made him a sign, and his mouth, remaining silent, gradually closed.

"This moment come, my lord," said D'Artagnan.

Mazarin breathed again. His fears were now no longer for his hoard, but for himself. A sort of smile played on his lips.

"Come," he said, "you have me in a snare, gentlemen. I confess myself conquered. You wish to ask for liberty, and — I give it you."

"Oh, my lord!" answered D'Artagnan, "you are too good; as to our liberty, we have that; we want to ask something else of you."

"You have your liberty?" repeated Mazarin, in terror.

"Certainly; and on the other hand, my lord, you have lost it, and now, in accordance with the law of war, sir, you must buy it back again."

Mazarin felt a shiver run through him — a chill even to his heart's core. His piercing look was fixed in vain on the satirical face of the Gascon and the unchanging countenance of Porthos. Both were in shadow and the Sybil of Cuma herself could not have read them.

"To purchase back my liberty?" said the cardinal.

"Yes, my lord."

"And how much will that cost me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"Zounds, my lord, I don't know yet. We must ask the Comte de la Fère the question. Will your eminence deign

to open the door which leads to the count's room, and in ten minutes all will be settled."

Mazarin started.

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "your eminence sees that we wish to act with all formality and due respect; but I must warn you that we have no time to lose; open the door then, my lord, and be so good as to remember, once for all, that on the slightest attempt to escape or the faintest cry for help, our position being very critical indeed, you must not be angry with us if we go to extremities."

"Be assured," answered Mazarin, "that I shall attempt nothing; I give you my word of honor."

D'Artagnan made a sign to Porthos to redouble his watchfulness; then turning to Mazarin:

"Now, my lord, let us enter, if you please."

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

CONFERENCES.

MAZARIN turned the lock of a double door, on the threshold of which they found Athos ready to receive his illustrious guests according to the notice Comminges had given him.

On perceiving Mazarin he bowed.

"Your eminence," he said, "might have dispensed with your attendants; the honor bestowed on me is too great for me to be unmindful of it."

"And so, my dear count," said D'Artagnan, "his eminence didn't actually insist on our attending him; it is Du Vallon and I who have insisted, and even in a manner somewhat impolite, perhaps, so great was our longing to see you."

At that voice, that mocking tone, and that familiar gesture, accenting voice and tone, Athos made a bound of surprise.

"D'Artagnan! Porthos!" he exclaimed.

"My very self, dear friend."

"Me, also!" repeated Porthos.

"What means this?" asked the count.

"It means," replied Mazarin, trying to smile and biting his lips in the attempt, "that our parts are changed, and that instead of these gentlemen being my prisoners I am theirs; but, gentlemen, I warn you, unless you kill me, your victory will be of very short duration; people will come to the rescue."

"Ah! my lord!" cried the Gascon, "don't threaten! 'tis a bad example. We are so good and gentle to your eminence. Come, let us put aside all rancor and talk pleasantly."

"There's nothing I wish more," replied Mazarin. "But don't think yourselves in a better position than you are. 111

ensnaring me you have fallen into the trap yourselves. How are you to get away from here? remember the soldiers and sentinels who guard these doors. Now, I am going to show you how sincere I am."

"Good," thought D'Artagnan; "we must look about us; he's going to play us a trick."

"I offered you your liberty," continued the minister; "will you take it? Before an hour has passed you will be discovered, arrested, obliged to kill me, which would be a crime unworthy of loyal gentlemen like you."

"He is right," thought Athos.

And, like every other reflection passing in a mind that entertained none but noble thoughts, this feeling was expressed in his eyes.

"And therefore," said D'Artagnan, to clip the hope which Athos's tacit adhesion had imparted to Mazarin, "we shall not proceed to that violence save in the last extremity."

"If on the contrary," resumed Mazarin, "you accept your liberty ——"

"Why you, my lord, might take it away from us in less than five minutes afterward; and from my knowledge of you I believe you will so take it away from us."

"No — on the faith of a cardinal. You do not believe me?"

"My lord, I never believe cardinals who are not priests."

"Well, on the faith of a minister."

"You are no longer a minister, my lord; you are a prisoner."

"Then, on the honor of a Mazarin, as I am and ever shall be, I hope," said the cardinal.

"Hem," replied D'Artagnan. "I have heard speak of a Mazarin who had not much religion when his oaths were in question. I fear he may have been an ancestor of your eminence."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, you are a great wit and I am really sorry to be on bad terms with you."

"My lord, let us come to terms; I ask nothing better."

"Very well," said Mazarin, "if I place you in security, in a manner evident, palpable ——"

"Ah! that is another thing," said Porthos.

"Let us see," said Athos.

"Let us see," said D'Artagnan.

"In the first place, do you accept?" asked the cardinal.

"Unfold your plan, my lord, and we will see."

"Take notice that you are shut up — captured."

"You well know, my lord, that there always remains to us a last resource."

"What?"

"That of dying together."

Mazarin shuddered.

"Listen," he said; "at the end of yonder corridor is a door, of which I have the key; it leads into the park. Go, and take this key with you; you are active, vigorous and you have arms. At a hundred steps, on turning to the left, you will find the wall of the park; get over it, and in three leaps you will be on the road and free."

"Ah! by Jove, my lord," said D'Artagnan, "you have well said, but these are only words. Where is the key you speak of?"

"Here it is."

"Ah, my lord! You will conduct us yourself, then, to that door?"

"Very willingly, if it be necessary to reassure you," answered the minister; and Mazarin, who was delighted to get off so cheaply, led the way, in high spirits, to the corridor and opened the door.

It led into the park, as the three fugitives perceived by the night breeze which rushed into the corridor and blew the wind into their faces.

"The devil!" exclaimed the Gascon, "'tis a dreadful night, my lord. We don't know the locality, and shall never find the wall. Since your eminence has come so far, come a few steps further; conduct us, my lord, to the wall."

"Be it so," replied the cardinal; and walking in a straight

line he went to the wall, at the foot of which they all four arrived at the same instant.

"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?" asked Mazarin.

"I think so, indeed; we should be hard to please if we were not. Deuce take it! three poor gentlemen escorted by a prince of the church! Ah! apropos, my lord! you remarked that we were all active, vigorous and armed."

"Yes."

"You are mistaken. Monsieur du Vallon and I are the only two who are armed. The count is not; and should we meet with one of your patrol we must defend ourselves."

"'Tis true."

"Where can we find another sword?" asked Porthos.

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "will lend his, which is of no use to him, to the Comte de la Fère."

"Willingly," said the cardinal; "I will even ask the count to keep it for my sake."

"I promise you, my lord, never to part with it," replied Athos.

"Well, well," cried D'Artagnan, "this reconciliation is truly touching; have you not tears in your eyes, Porthos?"

"Yes," said Porthos; "but I do not know if it is feeling or the wind that makes me weep; I think it is the wind."

"Now climb up, Athos, quickly," said D'Artagnan. Athos, assisted by Porthos, who lifted him up like a feather, arrived at the top.

"Now, jump down, Athos."

Athos jumped and disappeared on the other side of the wall.

"Are you on the ground?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Without accident?"

"Perfectly safe and sound."

"Porthos, whilst I get up, watch the cardinal. No, I don't want your help, watch the cardinal."

"I am watching," said Porthos. "Well?"

"You are right; it is more difficult than I thought. Lend me your back — but don't let the cardinal go."

Porthos lent him his back and D'Artagnan was soon on the summit of the wall, where he seated himself.

Mazarin pretended to laugh.

"Are you there?" asked Porthos.

"Yes, my friend; and now ——"

"Now, what?" asked Porthos.

"Now give me the cardinal up here; if he makes any noise stifle him."

Mazarin wished to call out, but Porthos held him tight and passed him to D'Artagnan, who seized him by the neck and made him sit down by him; then in a menacing tone, he said:

"Sir! jump directly down, close to Monsieur de la Fère, or, on the honor of a gentleman, I'll kill you!"

"Monsieur, monsieur," cried Mazarin, "you are breaking your word to me!"

"I — did I promise you anything, my lord?"

Mazarin groaned.

"You are free," he said, "through me; your liberty was my ransom."

"Agreed; but the ransom of that immense treasure buried under the gallery, to which one descends on pushing a spring hidden in the wall, which causes a tub to turn, revealing a staircase — must not one speak of that a little, my lord?"

"*Diavolo!*" cried Mazarin, almost choked, and clasping his hands; "I am a lost and ruined man!"

But without listening to his protestations of alarm, D'Artagnan slipped him gently down into the arms of Athos, who stood immovable at the bottom of the wall.

Porthos next made an effort which shook the solid wall, and by the aid of his friend's hand gained the summit.

"I didn't understand it all," he said, "but I understand now; how droll it is!"

"You think so? so much the better; but that it may prove laughter-worthy even to the end, let us not lose time." And he jumped off the wall.

Porthos did the same.

"Attend to monsieur le cardinal, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan; "for myself, I will reconnoitre."

The Gascon then drew his sword and marched as *avant* guard.

"My lord," he said, "which way do we go? Think well of your reply, for should your eminence be mistaken, there might ensue most grave results for all of us."

"Along the wall, sir," said Mazarin, "there will be no danger of losing yourselves."

The three friends hastened on, but in a short time were obliged to slacken their pace. The cardinal could not keep up with them, though with every wish to do so.

Suddenly D'Artagnan touched something warm, which moved.

"Stop! a horse!" he cried; "I have found a horse!"

"And I, likewise," said Athos.

"I, too," said Porthos, who, faithful to the instructions, still held the cardinal's arm.

"There's luck, my lord! just as you were complaining of being tired and obliged to walk."

But as he spoke the barrel of a pistol was presented at his breast and these words were pronounced:

"Touch it not!"

"Grimaud!" he cried; "Grimaud! what art thou about? Why, thou art posted here by Heaven!"

"No, sir," said the honest servant; "it was Monsieur Aramis who posted me here to take care of the horses."

"Is Aramis here?"

"Yes, sir; he has been here since yesterday."

"What are you doing?"

"On the watch ——"

"What! Aramis here?" cried Athos.

"At the lesser gate of the castle; he's posted there."

"Are you a large party?"

"Sixty."

"Let him know."

"This moment, sir."

And believing that no one could execute the commission better than himself, Grimaud set off at full speed; whilst, enchanted at being all together again, the friends awaited his return.

There was no one in the whole group in a bad humor except Cardinal Mazarin.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

IN WHICH WE BEGIN TO THINK THAT PORTHOS WILL BE AT
LAST A BARON, AND D'ARTAGNAN A CAPTAIN.

At the expiration of ten minutes Aramis arrived, accompanied by Grimaud and eight or ten followers. He was excessively delighted and threw himself into his friends' arms.

"You are free, my brothers ! free without my aid ! and I shall have succeeded in doing nothing for you in spite of all my efforts."

"Do not be unhappy, dear friend, on that account ; if you have done nothing as yet, you will do something soon," replied Athos.

"I had well concerted my plans," pursued Aramis ; "the coadjutor gave me sixty men ; twenty guard the walls of the park, twenty the road from Rueil to Saint Germain, twenty are dispersed in the woods. Thus I was able, thanks to the strategic disposition of my forces, to intercept two couriers from Mazarin to the queen."

Mazarin listened intently.

"But," said D'Artagnan, "I trust that you honorably sent them back to monsieur le cardinal !"

"Ah, yes !" said Aramis ; "toward him I should be very likely to practice such delicacy of sentiment ! In one of the despatches the cardinal declares to the queen that the treasury is empty and that her majesty has no more money. In the other he announces that he is about to transport his prisoners to Melun, since Rueil seemed to him not sufficiently secure. You can understand, dear friend, with what hope I was inspired by that last letter. I

placed myself in ambuscade with my sixty men; I encircled the castle; the riding-horses I entrusted to Grimaud and I awaited your coming out, which I did not expect till to-morrow, and I didn't hope to free you without a skirmish. You are free to-night, without fighting; so much the better! How did you manage to escape that scoundrel, Mazarin? You must have much reason to complain of him."

"Not very much," said D'Artagnan.

"Really!"

"I might even say that we have some reason to praise him."

"Impossible!"

"Yes, really; it is owing to him that we are free."

"Owing to him?"

"Yes, he had us conducted into the orangery by Monsieur Bernouin, his *valet-de-chambre*, and from there we followed him to visit the Comte de la Fère. Then he offered us our liberty and we accepted it. He even went so far as to show us the way out; he led us to the park wall, which we climbed over without accident, and then we fell in with Grimaud."

"Well!" exclaimed Aramis, "this will reconcile me to him; but I wish he were here that I might tell him that I did not believe him capable of so noble an act."

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, no longer able to contain himself, "allow me to introduce to you the Chevalier d'Herblay, who wishes—as you may have heard—to offer his congratulations to your eminence."

And he retired, discovering Mazarin, who was in great confusion, to the astonished gaze of Aramis.

"Ho! ho!" exclaimed the latter, "the cardinal! a glorious prize! Halloo! halloo! friends! to horse! to horse!"

Several horsemen ran quickly to him.

"Zounds!" cried Aramis, "I may have done some good; so, my lord, deign to receive my most respectful homage! I will lay a wager that 'twas that Saint Christopher, Porthos, who performed this feat! Apropos! I forgot——" and he gave some orders in a low voice to one of the horsemen.

"I think it will be wise to set off," said D'Artagnan.

"Yes; but I am expecting some one, a friend of Athos."

"A friend!" exclaimed the count.

"And here he comes, by Jupiter! galloping through the bushes."

"The count! the count!" cried a young voice that made Athos start.

"Raoul! Raoul!" he ejaculated.

For one moment the young man forgot his habitual respect—he threw himself on his father's neck.

"Look, my lord cardinal," said Aramis, "would it not have been a pity to have separated men who love each other as we love? Gentlemen," he continued, addressing the cavaliers, who became more and more numerous every instant; "gentlemen, encircle his eminence, that you may show him the greater honor. He will, indeed, give us the favor of his company; you will, I hope, be grateful for it; Porthos, do not lose sight of his eminence."

Aramis then joined Athos and D'Artagnan, who were consulting together.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, after a conference of five minutes' duration, "let us begin our journey."

"Where are we to go?" asked Porthos.

"To your house, dear Porthos, at Pierrefonds; your fine château is worthy of affording its princely hospitality to his eminence; it is, likewise, well situated—neither too near Paris, nor too far from it; we can establish a communication between it and the capital with great facility. Come, my lord, you shall be treated like a prince, as you are."

"A fallen prince!" exclaimed Mazarin, piteously.

"The chances of war," said Athos, "are many, but be assured we shall take no improper advantage of them."

"No, but we shall make use of them," said D'Artagnan.

The rest of the night was employed by these cavaliers in traveling with the wonderful rapidity of former days. Mazarin, still sombre and pensive, permitted himself to be dragged along in this way; it looked a race of phantoms. At dawn

twelve leagues had been passed without drawing rein; half the escort were exhausted and several horses fell down.

"Horses, nowadays, are not what they were formerly," observed Porthos; "everything degenerates."

"I have sent Grimaud to Dammartin," said Aramis. "He is to bring us five fresh horses—one for his eminence, four for us. We, at least, must keep close to monseigneur; the rest of the start will rejoin us later. Once beyond Saint Denis we shall have nothing to fear."

Grimaud, in fact, brought back five horses. The nobleman to whom he applied, being a friend of Porthos, was very ready, not to sell them, as was proposed, but to lend them. Ten minutes later the escort stopped at Ermenonville, but the four friends went on with well sustained ardor, guarding Mazarin carefully. At noon they rode into the avenue of Pierrefonds.

"Ah!" said Musqueton, who had ridden by the side of D'Artagnan without speaking a word on the journey, "you may think what you will, sir, but I can breathe now for the first time since my departure from Pierrefonds;" and he put his horse to a gallop to announce to the other servants the arrival of Monsieur du Vallon and his friends.

"We are four of us," said D'Artagnan; "we must relieve each other in mounting guard over my lord and each of us must watch three hours at a time. Athos is going to examine the castle, which it will be necessary to render impregnable in case of siege; Porthos will see to the provisions and Aramis to the troops of the garrison. That is to say, Athos will be chief engineer, Porthos purveyor-in-general, and Aramis governor of the fortress."

Meanwhile, they gave up to Mazarin the handsomest room in the château.

"Gentlemen," he said, when he was in his room, "you do not expect, I presume, to keep me here a long time *incognito*?"

"No, my lord," replied the Gascon; "on the contrary, we think of announcing very soon that we have you here."

"Then you will be besieged."

"We expect it."

"And what shall you do?"

"Defend ourselves. Were the late Cardinal Richelieu alive he would tell you a certain story of the Bastion Saint Gervais, which we four, with our four lackeys and twelve dead men, held out against a whole army."

"Such feats, sir, are done once — and never repeated."

"However, nowadays there's no need of so much heroism. To-morrow the army of Paris will be summoned, the day after it will be here! The field of battle, instead, therefore, of being at Saint Denis or at Charenton, will be near Compiègne or Villars-Cotterets."

"The prince will vanquish you, as he has always done."

"Tis possible, my lord; but before an engagement ensues we shall move your eminence to *another* castle belonging to our friend Du Vallon, who has *three*. We will not expose your eminence to the chances of war."

"Come," answered Mazarin, "I see it will be necessary for me to capitulate."

"Before a siege?"

"Yes; the conditions will be better than afterward."

"Ah, my lord! as to conditions, you would soon see how moderate and reasonable we are!"

"Come, now, what are your conditions?"

"Rest yourself first, my lord, and we — we will reflect."

"I do not need rest, gentlemen; I need to know whether I am among enemies or friends."

"Friends, my lord! friends!"

"Well, then, tell me at once what you want, that I may see if any arrangement be possible. Speak, Comte de la Fère!"

"My lord," replied Athos, "for myself I have nothing to demand. For France, were I to specify my wishes, I should have too much. I beg you to excuse me and propose to the chevalier."

And Athos, bowing, retired and remained leaning against the mantelpiece, a spectator of the scene.

"Speak, then, chevalier!" said the cardinal. "What do you want? Nothing ambiguous, if you please. Be clear, short and precise."

"As for me," replied Aramis, "I have in my pocket the very programme of the conditions which the deputation — of which I formed one — went yesterday to Saint Germain to impose on you. Let us consider first the ancient rights. The demands in that programme *must* be granted."

"We were almost agreed on those," replied Mazarin; "let us pass on to private and personal stipulations."

"You suppose, then, that there *are* some?" said Aramis, smiling.

"I do not suppose that you will all be quite so disinterested as Monsieur de la Fère," replied the cardinal, bowing to Athos.

"My lord, you are right, and I am glad to see that you do justice to the count at last. The count has a mind above vulgar desires and earthly passions. He is a proud soul — he is a man by himself! You are right — he is worth us all, and we avow it to you!"

"Aramis," said Athos, "are you jesting?"

"No, no, dear friend; I state only what we all know. You are right; it is not you alone this matter concerns, but my lord and his unworthy servant, myself."

"Well, then, what do you require besides the general conditions before recited?"

"I require, my lord, that Normandy should be given to Madame de Longueville, with five hundred thousand francs and full absolution. I require that his majesty should deign to be godfather to the child she has just borne; and that my lord, after having been present at the christening, should go to proffer his homage to our Holy Father the Pope."

"That is, you wish me to lay aside my ministerial functions, to quit France and be an exile."

"I wish his eminence to become pope on the first opportunity, allowing me then the right of demanding full indulgences for myself and my friends."

Mazarin made a grimace which was quite indescribable, and then turned to D'Artagnan.

"And you, sir?" he said.

"I, my lord," answered the Gascon, "I differ from Monsieur d'Herblay entirely as to the last point, though I agree with him on the first. Far from wishing my lord to quit Paris, I hope he will stay there and continue to be prime minister, as he is a great statesman. I shall try also to help him to down the Fronde, but on one condition — that he sometimes remembers the king's faithful servants and gives the first vacant company of musketeers to a man that I could name. And you, Monsieur du Vallon —"

"Yes, you, sir! Speak, if you please," said Mazarin.

"As for me," answered Porthos, "I wish my lord cardinal, in order to do honor to my house, which gives him an asylum, would in remembrance of this adventure erect my estate into a barony, with a promise to confer that order on one of my particular friends, whenever his majesty next creates peers."

"You know, sir, that before receiving the order one must submit proofs."

"My friend will submit them. Besides, should it be necessary, monseigneur will show him how that formality may be avoided."

Mazarin bit his lips; the blow was direct and he replied rather dryly:

"All this appears to me to be ill conceived, disjointed, gentlemen; for if I satisfy some I shall displease others. If I stay in Paris I cannot go to Rome; if I became pope I could not continue to be prime minister; and it is only by continuing prime minister that I can make Monsieur d'Artagnan a captain and Monsieur du Vallon a baron."

"True," said Aramis, "so, as I am in a minority, I withdraw my proposition, so far as it relates to the voyage to Rome and monseigneur's resignation."

"I am to remain minister, then?" said Mazarin.

"You remain minister; that is understood," said D'Artagnan; "France needs you."

"And I desist from my pretensions," said Aramis. "His eminence will continue to be prime minister and her majesty's favorite, if he will grant to me and my friends what we demand for France and for ourselves."

"Occupy yourselves with your own affairs, gentlemen, and let France settle matters as she will with me," resumed Mazarin.

"Ho! ho!" replied Aramis. "The Frondeurs will have a treaty and your eminence must sign it before us, promising at the same time to obtain the queen's consent to it."

"I can answer only for myself," said Mazarin. "I cannot answer for the queen. Suppose her majesty refuses?"

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, "monseigneur knows very well that her majesty refuses him nothing."

"Here, monseigneur," said Aramis, "is the treaty proposed by the deputation of Frondeurs. Will your eminence please read and examine?"

"I am acquainted with it."

"Sign it, then."

"Reflect, gentlemen, that a signature given under circumstances like the present might be regarded as extorted by violence."

"Monseigneur will be at hand to testify that it was freely given."

"Suppose I refuse?"

"Then," said D'Artagnan, "your eminence must expect the consequences of a refusal."

"Would you dare to touch a cardinal?"

"You have dared, my lord, to imprison her majesty's musketeers."

"The queen will revenge me, gentlemen."

"I do not think so, although inclination might lead her to do so, but we shall take your eminence to Paris, and the Parisians will defend us."

"How uneasy they must be at this moment at Rueil and Saint Germain," said Aramis. "How they must be asking, 'Where is the cardinal?' 'What has become of the minis-

ter?' 'Where has the favorite gone?' How they must be looking for monseigneur in all corners! What comments must be made; and if the Fronde knows that monseigneur has disappeared, how the Fronde must triumph!"

"It is frightful," murmured Mazarin.

"Sign the treaty, then, monseigneur," said Aramis.

"Suppose the queen should refuse to ratify it?"

"Ah! nonsense!" cried D'Artagnan, "I can manage so that her majesty will receive me well; I know an excellent method."

"What?"

"I shall take her majesty the letter in which you tell her that the finances are exhausted."

"And then?" asked Mazarin, turning pale.

"When I see her majesty embarrassed, I shall conduct her to Rueil, make her enter the orangery and show her a certain spring which turns a box."

"Enough, sir," muttered the cardinal, "you have said enough; where is the treaty?"

"Here it is," replied Aramis. "Sign, my lord," and he gave him a pen.

Mazarin arose, walked some moments, thoughtful, but not dejected.

"And when I have signed," he said, "what is to be my guarantee?"

"My word of honor, sir," said Athos.

Mazarin started, turned toward the Comte de la Fère, and looking for an instant at that grand and honest countenance, took the pen.

"It is sufficient, count," he said, and signed the treaty.

"And now, Monsieur d'Artagnan," he said, "prepare to set off for Saint Germain and take a letter from me to the queen."

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

SHOWS HOW WITH THREAT AND PEN MORE IS EFFECTED
THAN BY THE SWORD.

D'ARTAGNAN knew his part well; he was aware that opportunity has a forelock only for him who will take it and he was not a man to let it go by him without seizing it. He soon arranged a prompt and certain manner of traveling, by sending relays of horses to Chantilly, so that he might be in Paris in five or six hours. But before setting out he reflected that for a lad of intelligence and experience he was in a singular predicament, since he was proceeding toward uncertainty and leaving certainty behind him.

"In fact," he said, as he was about to mount and start on his dangerous mission, "Athos, for generosity, is a hero of romance; Porthos has an excellent disposition, but is easily influenced; Aramis has a hieroglyphic countenance, always illegible. What will come out of those three elements when I am no longer present to combine them? The deliverance of the cardinal, perhaps. Now, the deliverance of the cardinal would be the ruin of our hopes; and our hopes are thus far the only recompense we have for labors in comparison with which those of Hercules were pygmean."

He went to find Aramis.

"You, my dear Chevalier d'Herblay," he said, "are the Fronde incarnate. Mistrust Athos, therefore, who will not prosecute the affairs of any one, even his own. Mistrust Porthos, especially, who, to please the count, whom he regards as God on earth, will assist him in contriving Mazarin's escape, if Mazarin has the wit to weep or play the chivalric."

Aramis smiled; his smile was at once cunning and resolute.

"Fear nothing," he said; "I have my conditions to impose. My private ambition tends only to the profit of him who has justice on his side."

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan: "in this direction I am satisfied." He pressed Aramis's hand and went in search of Porthos.

"Friend," he said, "you have worked so hard with me toward building up our fortune, that, at the moment when we are about to reap the fruits of our labors, it would be a ridiculous piece of silliness in you to allow yourself to be controlled by Aramis, whose cunning you know — a cunning which, we may say between ourselves, is not always without egotism; or by Athos, a noble and disinterested man, but *blasé*, who, desiring nothing further for himself, doesn't sympathize with the desires of others. What should you say if either of these two friends proposed to you to let Mazarin go?"

"Why, I should say that we had too much trouble in taking him to let him off so easily."

"Bravo, Porthos! and you would be right, my friend; for in losing him you would lose your barony, which you have in your grasp, to say nothing of the fact that, were he once out of this, Mazarin would have you hanged."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then I would kill him rather than let him go."

"And you would act rightly. There is no question, you understand, provided we secure our own interests, of securing those of the Frondeurs; who, besides, don't understand political matters as we old soldiers do."

"Never fear, dear friend," said Porthos. "I shall see you through the window as you mount your horse; I shall follow you with my eyes as long as you are in sight; then I shall place myself at the cardinal's door — a door with glass windows. I shall see everything and at the least suspicious sign I shall begin to exterminate."

"Bravo!" thought D'Artagnan; "on this side I think the cardinal will be well guarded." He pressed the hand of the lord of Pierrefonds and went in search of Athos.

"My dear Athos," he said, "I am going away. I have only one thing to say to you. You know Anne of Austria; the captivity of Mazarin alone guarantees my life; if you let him go I am a dead man."

"I needed nothing less than that consideration, my dear D'Artagnan, to persuade myself to adopt the rôle of jailer. I give you my word that you will find the cardinal where you leave him."

"This reassures me more than all the royal signatures," thought D'Artagnan. "Now that I have the word of Athos I can set out."

D'Artagnan started alone on his journey, without other escort than his sword and with a simple passport from Mazarin to secure his admission to the queen's presence. Six hours after he left Pierrefonds he was at Saint Germain.

The disappearance of Mazarin was not as yet generally known. Anne of Austria was informed of it and concealed her uneasiness from every one. In the chamber of D'Artagnan and Porthos the two soldiers had been found bound and gagged. On recovering the use of their limbs and tongues they could, of course, tell nothing but what they knew — that they had been seized, stripped and bound. But as to what had been done by Porthos and D'Artagnan afterward they were as ignorant as all the inhabitants of the château.

Bernouin alone knew a little more than the others. Bernouin, seeing that his master did not return and hearing the stroke of midnight, had made an examination of the orangery. The first door, barricaded with furniture, had aroused in him certain suspicions, but without communicating his suspicions to any one he had patiently worked his way into the midst of all that confusion. Then he came to the corridor, all the doors of which he found open; so, too, was the door of Athos's chamber and that of the park. From the

latter point it was easy to follow tracks on the snow. He saw that these tracks tended toward the wall; on the other side he found similar tracks, then footprints of horses and then signs of a troop of cavalry which had moved away in the direction of Enghien. He could no longer cherish any doubt that the cardinal had been carried off by the three prisoners, since the prisoners had disappeared at the same time; and he had hastened to Saint Germain to warn the queen of that disappearance.

Anne had enforced the utmost secrecy and had disclosed the event to no one except the Prince de Condé, who had sent five or six hundred horsemen into the environs of Saint Germain with orders to bring in any suspicious person who was going away from Rueil, in whatsoever direction it might be.

Now, since D'Artagnan did not constitute a body of horsemen, since he was alone, since he was not going away from Rueil and was going to Saint Germain, no one paid any attention to him and his journey was not obstructed in any way.

On entering the courtyard of the old château the first person seen by our ambassador was Maître Bernouin in person, who, standing on the threshold, awaited news of his vanished master.

At the sight of D'Artagnan, who entered the courtyard on horseback, Bernouin rubbed his eyes and thought he must be mistaken. But D'Artagnan made a friendly sign to him with his head, dismounted, and throwing his bridle to a lackey who was passing, he approached the *valet-de-chambre* with a smile on his lips.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!" cried the latter, like a man who has the nightmare and talks in his sleep, "Monsieur d'Artagnan!"

"Himself, Monsieur Bernouin."

"And why have you come here?"

"To bring news of Monsieur de Mazarin — the freshest news there is."

"What has become of him, then?"

"He is as well as you and I."

"Nothing bad has happened to him, then?"

"Absolutely nothing. He felt the need of making a trip in the Ile de France, and begged us — the Comte de la Fère and Monsieur du Vallon — to accompany him. We were too devoted servants to refuse him a request of that sort. We set out last evening and here we are."

"Here you are."

"His eminence had something to communicate to her majesty, something secret and private — a mission that could be confided only to a sure man — and so has sent me to Saint Germain. And therefore, my dear Monsieur Bernouin, if you wish to do what will be pleasing to your master, announce to her majesty that I have come and tell her with what purpose."

Whether he spoke seriously or in jest, since it was evident that under existing circumstances D'Artagnan was the only man who could relieve the queen's uneasiness, Bernouin went without hesitation to announce to her this strange embassy; and as he had foreseen, the queen gave orders to introduce Monsieur d'Artagnan at once.

D'Artagnan approached the sovereign with every mark of profound respect, and having fallen on his knees presented to her the cardinal's letter.

It was, however, merely a letter of introduction. The queen read it, recognized the writing, and, since there were no details in it of what had occurred, asked for particulars. D'Artagnan related everything with that simple and ingenuous air which he knew how to assume on occasions. The queen, as he went on, looked at him with increasing astonishment. She could not comprehend how a man could conceive such an enterprise and still less how he could have the audacity to disclose it to her whose interest and almost duty it was to punish him.

"How, sir!" she cried, as D'Artagnan finished, "you dare to tell me the details of your crime — to give me an account of your treason!"

"Pardon, madame, but I think that either I have expressed myself badly or your majesty has imperfectly understood me. There is here no question of crime or treason. Monsieur de Mazarin held us in prison, Monsieur du Vallon and myself, because we could not believe that he had sent us to England to quietly look on while they cut off the head of Charles I., brother-in-law of the late king, your husband, the consort of Madame Henrietta, your sister and your guest, and because we did all that we could do to save the life of the royal martyr. We were then convinced, my friend and I, that there was some error of which we were the victims and that an explanation was called for between his eminence and ourselves. Now, that an explanation may bear fruit, it is necessary that it should be quietly conducted, far from noise and interruption. We have therefore taken away monsieur le cardinal to my friend's château and there we have come to an understanding. Well, madame, it proved to be as we had supposed; there was a mistake. Monsieur de Mazarin had thought that we had rendered service to General Cromwell, instead of King Charles, which would have been a disgrace, rebounding from us to him, and from him to your majesty—a dishonor which would have tainted the royalty of your illustrious son. We were able to prove the contrary, and that proof we are ready to give to your majesty, calling in support of it the august widow weeping in the Louvre, where your royal munificence has provided for her a home. That proof satisfied him so completely that, as a sign of satisfaction, he has sent me, as your majesty may see, to consider with you what reparation should be made to gentlemen unjustly treated and wrongfully persecuted."

"I listen to you, and I wonder at you, sir," said the queen. "In fact, I have rarely seen such excess of impudence."

"Your majesty, on your side," said D'Artagnan, "is as much mistaken as to our intentions as the Cardinal Mazarin has always been."

"You are in error, sir," answered the queen. "I am so little mistaken that in ten minutes you shall be arrested and in an hour I shall set off at the head of my army to release my minister."

"I am sure your majesty will not commit such an act of imprudence, first, because it would be useless and would produce the most disastrous results. Before he could be possibly set free the cardinal would be dead; and indeed, so convinced is he of this, that he entreated me, should I find your majesty disposed to act in this way, to do all I could to induce you to change your resolution."

"Well, then, I will content myself with arresting you!"

"Madame, the possibility of my arrest has been foreseen, and should I not have returned by to-morrow, at a certain hour the next day the cardinal will be brought to Paris and delivered to the parliament."

"It is evident, sir, that your position has kept you out of relation to men and affairs; otherwise you would know that since we left Paris monsieur le cardinal has returned thither five or six times; that he has there met De Beaufort, De Bouillon, the coadjutor and D'Elbeuf, and that not one of them had any desire to arrest him."

"Your pardon, madame, I know all that. And therefore my friends will conduct monsieur le cardinal neither to De Beaufort, nor to De Bouillon, nor to the coadjutor, nor to D'Elbeuf. These gentlemen wage war on private account, and in buying them up, by granting them what they wished, monsieur le cardinal has made a good bargain. He will be delivered to the parliament, members of which can, of course, be bought, but even Monsieur de Mazarin is not rich enough to buy the whole body."

"I think," returned Anne of Austria, fixing upon him a glance, which in any woman's face would have expressed disdain, but in a queen's, spread terror to those she looked upon, "nay, I perceive you dare to threaten the mother of your sovereign."

"Madame," replied D'Artagnan, "I threaten simply and

solely because I am obliged to do so. Believe me, madame, as true a thing as it is that a heart beats in this bosom—a heart devoted to you—believe that you have been the idol of our lives; that we have, as you well know—good Heaven!—risked our lives twenty times for your majesty. Have you, then, madame, no compassion for your servants who for twenty years have vegetated in obscurity, without betraying in a single sigh the solemn and sacred secrets they have had the honor to share with you? Look at me, madame—at me, whom you accuse of speaking loud and threateningly. What am I? A poor officer, without fortune, without protection, without a future, unless the eye of my queen, which I have sought so long, rests on me for a moment. Look at the Comte de la Fère, a type of nobility, a flower of chivalry. He has taken part against his queen, or rather, against her minister. He has not been unreasonably exacting, it seems to me. Look at Monsieur du Vallon, that faithful soul, that arm of steel, who for twenty years has awaited the word from your lips which will make him in rank what he is in sentiment and in courage. Consider, in short, your people who love you and who yet are famished; who have no other wish than to bless you and who, nevertheless—no, I am wrong, your subjects, madame, will never curse you; say one word to them and all will be ended—peace succeed war, joy tears, and happiness to misfortune!”

Anne of Austria looked with wonderment on the warlike countenance of D'Artagnan, which betrayed a singular expression of deep feeling.

“Why did you not say all this before you took action, sir?” she said.

“Because, madame, it was necessary to prove to your majesty one thing of which you doubted—that is, that we still possess amongst us some valor and are worthy of some consideration at your hands.”

“And that valor would shrink from no undertaking, according to what I see.”

"It has hesitated at nothing in the past; why, then, should it be less daring in the future?"

"Then, in case of my refusal, this valor, should a struggle occur, will even go the length of carrying me off in the midst of my court, to deliver me into the hands of the Fronde, as you propose to deliver my minister?"

"We have not thought about it *yet*, madame," answered D'Artagnan, with that Gascon effrontery which had in him the appearance of *naïveté*; "but if we four had resolved upon it we should do it most certainly."

"I ought," muttered Anne to herself, "by this time to remember that these men are giants."

"Alas, madame!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "this proves to me that not till to-day has your majesty had a just idea of us."

"Perhaps," said Anne; "but that idea, if at last I have it——"

"Your majesty will do us justice. In doing us justice you will no longer treat us as men of vulgar stamp. You will see in me an ambassador worthy of the high interests he is authorized to discuss with his sovereign."

"Where is the treaty?"

"Here it is."

Anne of Austria cast her eyes upon the treaty that D'Artagnan presented to her.

"I do not see here," she said, "anything but general conditions; the interests of the Prince de Conti or of the Ducs de Beaufort, de Bouillon and d'Elbeuf and of the coadjutor, are herein consulted; but with regard to yours?"

"We do ourselves justice, madame, even in assuming the high position that we have. We do not think ourselves worthy to stand near such great names."

"But you, I presume, have decided to assert your pretensions *viva voce*?"

"I believe you, madame, to be a great and powerful queen, and that it will be unworthy of your power and greatness if you do not recompense the arms which will bring back his eminence to Saint Germain."

"It is my intention so to do; come, let us hear you. Speak."

"He who has negotiated these matters (forgive me if I begin by speaking of myself, but I must claim that importance which has been given to me, not assumed by me) he who has arranged matters for the return of the cardinal, ought, it appears to me, in order that his reward may not be unworthy of your majesty, to be made commandant of the guards—an appointment something like that of captain of the musketeers."

"'Tis the appointment Monsieur de Treville held, you ask of me."

"The place, madame, is vacant; and although 'tis a year since Monsieur de Treville has left it, it has not been filled."

"But it is one of the principal military appointments in the king's household."

"Monsieur de Treville was but a younger son of a simple Gascon family, like me, madame; he occupied that post for twenty years."

"You have an answer ready for everything," replied the queen, and she took from her bureau a document, which she filled up and signed.

"Undoubtedly, madame," said D'Artagnan, taking the document and bowing, "this is a noble reward; but everything in the world is unstable, and the man who happened to fall into disgrace with your majesty might lose this office to-morrow."

"What more do you want?" asked the queen, coloring, as she found that she had to deal with a mind as subtle as her own.

"A hundred thousand francs for this poor captain of musketeers, to be paid whenever his services shall no longer be acceptable to your majesty."

Anne hesitated.

"To think of the Parisians," soliloquized D'Artagnan, "offering only the other day, by an edict of the parliament, six hundred thousand francs to any man soever who would

deliver up the cardinal to them, dead or alive — if alive, in order to hang him ; if dead, to deny him the rites of Christian burial ! ”

“ Come, ” said Anne, “ ’tis reasonable, since you only ask from a queen the sixth of what the parliament has proposed ; ” and she signed an order for a hundred thousand francs.

“ Now, then, ” she said, “ what next ? ”

“ Madame, my friend Du Vallon is rich and has therefore nothing in the way of fortune to desire ; but I think I remember that there was a question between him and Monsieur Mazarin as to making his estate a barony. Nay, it must have been a promise.”

“ A country clown, ” said Anne of Austria ; “ people will laugh.”

“ Let them, ” answered D’Artagnan. “ But I am sure of *one* thing — that those who laugh at him in his presence will never laugh a second time.”

“ Here goes the barony, ” said the queen ; she signed a patent.

“ Now there remains the chevalier, or the Abbé d’Herblay, as your majesty pleases.”

“ Does he wish to be a bishop ? ”

“ No, madame, something easier to grant.”

“ What ? ”

“ It is that the king should deign to stand godfather to the son of Madame de Longueville.”

The queen smiled.

“ Monsieur de Longueville is of royal blood, madame, ” said D’Artagnan.

“ Yes, ” said the queen ; “ but his son ? ”

“ His son, madame, must be, since the husband of the son’s mother is.”

“ And your friend has nothing more to ask for Madame de Longueville ? ”

“ No, madame, for I presume that the king, standing godfather to him, could do no less than present him with five hundred thousand francs, giving his father, also, the government of Normandy.”

"As to the government of Normandy," replied the queen, "I think I can promise; but with regard to the present, the cardinal is always telling me there is no more money in the royal coffers."

"We shall search for some, madame, and I think we can find a little, and if your majesty approves, we will seek for some together."

"What next?"

"What next, madame?"

"Yes."

"That is all."

"Haven't you, then, a fourth companion?"

"Yes, madame, the Comte de la Fère."

"What does he ask?"

"Nothing."

"There is in the world, then, one man who, having the power to ask, asks — *nothing!*"

"There is the Comte de la Fère, madame. The Comte de la Fère is not a man."

"What is he, then?"

"The Comte de la Fère is a demi-god."

"Has he not a son, a young man, a relative, a nephew, of whom Comminges spoke to me as being a brave boy, and who, with Monsieur de Châtillon, brought the standards from Lens?"

"He has, as your majesty has said, a ward, who is called the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"If that young man should be appointed to a regiment what would his guardian say?"

"Perhaps he would accept."

"Perhaps?"

"Yes, if your majesty herself should beg him to accept."

"He must be indeed a strange man. Well, we will reflect and perhaps we will beg him. Are you satisfied, sir?"

"There is one thing the queen has not signed — her assent to the treaty."

"Of what use to-day? I will sign it to-morrow."

"I can assure her majesty that if she does not sign to-day she will not have time to sign to-morrow. Consent, then, I beg you, madame, to write at the bottom of this schedule, which has been drawn up by Mazarin, as you see:

"'I consent to ratify the treaty proposed by the Parisians.'"

Anne was caught, she could not draw back — she signed; but scarcely had she done so when pride burst forth and she began to weep.

D'Artagnan started on seeing these tears. Since that period of history queens have shed tears, like other women.

The Gascon shook his head; these tears from royalty melted his heart.

"Madame," he said, kneeling, "look upon the unhappy man at your feet. He begs you to believe that at a gesture of your majesty everything will be possible to him. He has faith in himself; he has faith in his friends; he wishes also to have faith in his queen. And in proof that he fears nothing, that he counts on nothing, he will restore Monsieur de Mazarin to your majesty without conditions. Behold, madame! here are the august signatures of your majesty's hand; if you think you are right in giving them to me, you shall do so, but from this very moment you are free from any obligation to keep them."

And D'Artagnan, full of splendid pride and manly intrepidity, placed in Anne's hands, in a bundle, the papers that he had one by one won from her with so much difficulty.

There are moments — for if everything is not good, everything in this world is not bad — in which the most rigid and the coldest soul is softened by the tears of strong emotion, heart-arraigning sentiment: one of these momentary impulses actuated Anne. D'Artagnan, when he gave way to his own feelings — which were in accordance with those of the queen — had accomplished more than the most astute diplomacy could have attempted. He was therefore instantly recompensed, either for his address or for his sensibility, whichever it might be termed.

"You were right, sir," said Anne. "I misunderstood

you. There are the acts signed; I deliver them to you without compulsion. Go and bring me back the cardinal as soon as possible."

"Madame," faltered D'Artagnan, "'tis twenty years ago — I have a good memory — since I had the honor, behind a piece of tapestry in the Hôtel de Ville, of kissing one of those lovely hands."

"There is the other," replied the queen; "and that the left hand should not be less liberal than the right," she drew from her finger a diamond similar to the one formerly given to him, "take and keep this ring in remembrance of me."

"Madame," said D'Artagnan, rising, "I have only one thing more to wish, which is, that the next thing you ask from me, shall be — *my life*."

And with this conclusion — a way peculiar to himself — he rose and left the room.

"I never rightly understood those men," said the queen, as she watched him retiring from her presence; "and it is now too late, for in a year the king will be of age."

In twenty-four hours D'Artagnan and Porthos conducted Mazarin to the queen; and the one received his commission, the other his patent of nobility.

On the same day the Treaty of Paris was signed, and it was everywhere announced that the cardinal had shut himself up for three days in order to draw it up with the greatest care.

Here is what each of the parties concerned gained by that treaty:

Monsieur de Conti received Damvilliers, and having made his proofs as general, he succeeded in remaining a soldier, instead of being made cardinal. Moreover, something had been said of a marriage with Mazarin's niece. The idea was welcomed by the prince, to whom it was of little importance whom he married, so long as he married some one.

The Duc de Beaufort made his entrance at court, receiving ample reparation for the wrongs he had suffered, and all the honor due to his rank. Full pardon was accorded to those

who had aided in his escape. He received also the office of admiral, which had been held by his father, the Duc de Vendôme, and an indemnity for his houses and castles, demolished by the Parliament of Bretagne.

The Duc de Bouillon received domains of a value equal to that of his principality of Sedan, and the title of prince, granted to him and to those belonging to his house.

The Duc de Longueville gained the government of Pont-del'Arche, five hundred thousand francs for his wife and the honor of seeing her son held at the baptismal font by the young king and Henrietta of England.

Aramis stipulated that Bazin should officiate at that ceremony and that Planchet should furnish the christening sugar plums.

The Duc d'Elbeuf obtained payment of certain sums due to his wife, one hundred thousand francs for his eldest son and twenty-five thousand for each of the three others.

The coadjutor alone obtained nothing. They promised, indeed, to negotiate with the pope for a cardinal's hat for him; but he knew how little reliance should be placed on such promises, made by the queen and Mazarin. Quite contrary to the lot of Monsieur de Conti, unable to be cardinal, he was obliged to remain a soldier.

And therefore, when all Paris was rejoicing in the expected return of the king, appointed for the next day, Gondy alone, in the midst of the general happiness, was dissatisfied; he sent for the two men whom he was wont to summon when in especially bad humor. Those two men were the Count de Rochefort and the mendicant of Saint Eustache. They came with their usual promptness, and the coadjutor spent with them a part of the night.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT IT IS SOMETIMES MORE DIFFICULT FOR KINGS TO RETURN TO THE CAPITALS OF THEIR KINGDOMS, THAN TO MAKE AN EXIT.

WHILST D'Artagnan and Porthos were engaged in conducting the cardinal to Saint Germain, Athos and Aramis returned to Paris.

Each had his own particular visit to make.

Aramis rushed to the Hôtel de Ville, where Madame de Longueville was sojourning. The duchess loudly lamented the announcement of peace. War had made her a queen; peace brought her abdication. She declared that she would never assent to the treaty and that she wished eternal war.

But when Aramis had presented that peace to her in a true light — that is to say, with all its advantages; when he had pointed out to her, in exchange for the precarious and contested royalty of Paris, the viceroyalty of Pont-de-l'Arche, in other words, of all Normandy; when he had rung in her ears the five hundred thousand francs promised by the cardinal; when he had dazzled her eyes with the honor bestowed on her by the king in holding her child at the baptismal font, Madame de Longueville contended no longer, except as is the custom with pretty women to contend, and defended herself only to surrender at last.

Aramis made a pretence of believing in the reality of her opposition and was unwilling to deprive himself in his own view of the credit of her conversion.

"Madame," he said, "you have wished to conquer the prince your brother — that is to say, the greatest captain of the age; and when women of genius wish anything they

always succeed in attaining it. You have succeeded; the prince is beaten, since he can no longer fight. Now attach him to our party. Withdraw him gently from the queen, whom he does not like, from Mazarin, whom he despises. The Fronde is a comedy, of which the first act only is played. Let us wait for a *dénouement* — for the day when the prince, thanks to you, shall have turned against the court."

Madame de Longueville was persuaded. This Frondist duchess trusted so confidently to the power of her fine eyes, that she could not doubt their influence even over Monsieur de Condé; and the chronicles of the time aver that her confidence was justified.

Athos, on quitting Aramis, went to Madame de Chevreuse. Here was another *frondeuse* to persuade, and she was even less open to conviction than her younger rival. There had been no stipulation in her favor. Monsieur de Chevreuse had not been appointed governor of a province, and if the queen should consent to be god-mother it could be only of her grandson or granddaughter. At the first announcement of peace Madame de Chevreuse frowned, and in spite of all the logic of Athos to show her that a prolonged war would have been impracticable, contended in favor of hostilities.

"My fair friend," said Athos, "allow me to tell you that everybody is tired of war. You will get yourself exiled, as you did in the time of Louis XIII. Believe me, we have passed the time of success in intrigue, and your fine eyes are not destined to be eclipsed by regretting Paris, where there will always be two queens as long as you are there."

"Oh," cried the duchess, "I cannot make war alone, but I can avenge myself on that ungrateful queen and most ambitious favorite — on the honor of a duchess, I will avenge myself."

"Madame," replied Athos, "do not injure the Vicomte de Bragelonne — do not ruin his prospects. Alas! excuse my weakness! There are moments when a man grows young again in his children."



The duchess smiled, half tenderly, half ironically.

"Count," she said, "you are, I fear, gained over to the court. I suppose you have a blue ribbon in your pocket?"

"Yes, madame; I have that of the Garter, which King Charles I. gave me some days before he died."

"Come, I am growing an old woman!" said the duchess, pensively.

Athos took her hand and kissed it. She sighed, as she looked at him.

"Count," she said, "Bragelonne must be a charming place. You are a man of taste. You have water — woods — flowers there?"

She sighed again and leaned her charming head, gracefully reclined, on her hand, still beautiful in form and color.

"Madame!" exclaimed Athos, "what were you saying just now about growing old? Never have I seen you look so young, so beautiful!"

The duchess shook her head.

"Does Monsieur de Bragelonne remain in Paris?" she inquired.

"What think you of it?" inquired Athos.

"Leave him with me," replied the duchess.

"No, madame; if you have forgotten the history of Œdipus, I, at least, remember it."

"Really, sir, you are delightful, and I should like to spend a month at Bragelonne."

"Are you not afraid of making people envious of me, duchess?" replied Athos.

"No, I shall go *incognito*, count, under the name of Marie Michou."

"You are adorable, madame."

"But do not keep Raoul with you."

"Why not?"

"Because he is in love."

"He! he is quite a child!"

"And 'tis a child he loves."

Athos became thoughtful.

"You are right, duchess. This singular passion for a child of seven may some day make him very unhappy. There is to be war in Flanders. He shall go thither."

"And at his return you will send him to me. I will arm him against love."

"Alas, madame!" exclaimed Athos, "to-day love is like war — the breastplate is becoming useless."

Raoul entered at this moment; he came to announce that the solemn entrance of the king, the queen and her ministers was to take place on the ensuing day.

The next day, in fact, at daybreak, the court made preparations to quit Saint Germain.

Meanwhile, the queen every hour had been sending for D'Artagnan.

"I hear," she said, "that Paris is not quiet. I am afraid for the king's safety; place yourself close to the coach door on the right."

"Reassure yourself, madame, I will answer for the king's safety."

As he left the queen's presence Bernouin summoned him to the cardinal.

"Sir," said Mazarin to him, "an *émeute* is spoken of in Paris. I shall be on the king's left and as I am the chief person threatened, remain at the coach door to the left."

"Your eminence may be perfectly easy," replied D'Artagnan; "they will not touch a hair of your head."

"Deuce take it!" he thought to himself, "how can I take care of both? Ah! plague on't, I will guard the king and Porthos shall guard the cardinal."

This arrangement pleased every one. The queen had confidence in the courage of D'Artagnan, which she knew, and the cardinal in the strength of Porthos, which he had experienced.

The royal procession set out for Paris. Guitant and Comminges, at the head of the guards, marched first; then came the royal carriage, with D'Artagnan on one side, Porthos on the other; then the musketeers, for two and twenty years

staunch friends of D'Artagnan. During twenty he had been lieutenant, their captain since the night before.

The cortège proceeded to Notre Dame, where a *Te Deum* was chanted. All Paris were in the streets. The Swiss were drawn up along the road, but as the road was long, they were placed at six or eight feet distant from each other and one deep only. This force was therefore wholly insufficient, and from time to time the line was broken through by the people and was formed again with difficulty. Whenever this occurred, although it proceeded only from goodwill and a desire to see the king and queen, Anne looked at D'Artagnan anxiously.

Mazarin, who had dispensed a thousand louis to make the people cry "Long live Mazarin," and who had accordingly no confidence in acclamations bought at twenty pistoles each, kept one eye on Porthos; but that gigantic body-guard replied to the look with his great bass voice, "Be tranquil, my lord," and Mazarin became more and more composed.

At the Palais Royal, the crowd, which had flowed in from the adjacent street, was still greater; like an impetuous mob, a wave of human beings came to meet the carriage and rolled tumultuously into the Rue Saint Honoré.

When the procession reached the palace, loud cries of "Long live their majesties!" resounded. Mazarin leaned out of the window. One or two shouts of "Long live the cardinal" saluted his shadow; but instantly hisses and yells stifled them remorselessly. Mazarin turned pale and shrank back in the coach.

"Low-born fellows!" ejaculated Porthos.

D'Artagnan said nothing, but twirled his mustache with a peculiar gesture which showed that his fine Gascon humor was awake.

Anne of Austria bent down and whispered in the young king's ear:

"Say something gracious to Monsieur d'Artagnan, my son."

The young king leaned toward the door.

"I have not said good-morning to you, Monsieur d'Artagnan," he said; "nevertheless, I have remarked you. It was you who were behind my bed-curtains that night the Parisians wished to see me asleep."

"And if the king permits me," returned the Gascon, "I shall be near him always when there is danger to be encountered."

"Sir," said Mazarin to Porthos, "what would you do if the crowd fell upon us?"

"Kill as many as I could, my lord."

"Hem! brave as you are and strong as you are, you could not kill them all."

"Tis true," answered Porthos, rising on his saddle, in order that he might appraise the immense crowd, "there are a lot of them."

"I think I should like the other fellow better than this one," said Mazarin to himself, and he threw himself back in his carriage.

The queen and her minister, more especially the latter, had reason to feel anxious. The crowd, whilst preserving an appearance of respect and even of affection for the king and queen regent, began to be tumultuous. Reports were whispered about, like certain sounds which announce, as they whistle from wave to wave, the coming storm—and when they pass athwart a multitude, presage an *émeute*.

D'Artagnan turned toward the musketeers and made a sign imperceptible to the crowd, but very easily understood by that chosen regiment, the flower of the army.

The ranks closed firmly in and a kind of majestic tremor ran from man to man.

At the Barrière des Sergents the procession was obliged to stop. Comminges left the head of the escort and went to the queen's carriage. Anne questioned D'Artagnan by a look. He answered in the same language.

"Proceed," she said.

Comminges returned to his post. An effort was made and the living barrier was violently broken through.

Some complaints arose from the crowd and were addressed this time to the king as well as the minister.

"Onward!" cried D'Artagnan, in a loud voice.

"Onward!" cried Porthos.

But as if the multitude had waited only for this demonstration to burst out, all the sentiments of hostility that possessed it exploded simultaneously. Cries of "Down with Mazarin!" "Death to the cardinal!" resounded on all sides.

At the same time through the streets of Grenelle, Saint Honoré, and Du Coq, a double stream of people broke the feeble hedge of Swiss guards and came like a whirlwind even to the very legs of Porthos's horse and that of D'Artagnan.

This new eruption was more dangerous than the others, being composed of armed men. It was plain that it was not the chance combination of those who had collected a number of the malcontents at the same spot, but a concerted organized attack.

Each of these mobs was led by a chief, one of whom appeared to belong, not to the people, but to the honorable corporation of mendicants, and the other, notwithstanding his affected imitation of the people, might easily be discerned to be a gentleman. Both were evidently stimulated by the same impulse.

There was a shock which was perceived even in the royal carriage. Myriads of hoarse cries, forming one vast uproar, were heard, mingled with guns firing.

"Ho! Musketeers!" cried D'Artagnan.

The escort divided into two files. One of them passed around to the right of the carriage, the other to the left. One went to support D'Artagnan, the other Porthos. Then came a skirmish, the more terrible, because it had no definite object; the more melancholy, because those engaged in it knew not for whom they were fighting. Like all popular movements, the shock given by the rush of this mob was formidable. The musketeers, few in number, not being able, in the midst of this crowd, to make their horses wheel

around, began to give way. D'Artagnan offered to lower the blinds of the royal carriage, but the young king stretched out his arm, saying :

"No, sir ! I wish to see everything."

"If your majesty wishes to look out — well, then, look !" replied D'Artagnan. And turning with that fury which made him so formidable, he rushed toward the chief of the insurgents, a man who, with a huge sword in his hand, was trying to hew a passage to the coach door through the musketeers.

"Make room !" cried D'Artagnan. "Zounds ! give way !"

At these words the man with a pistol and sword raised his head, but it was too late. The blow was sped by D'Artagnan ; the rapier had pierced his bosom.

"Ah ! confound it !" cried the Gascon, trying in vain, too late, to retract the thrust. "What the devil are you doing here, count ?"

"Accomplishing my destiny," replied Rochefort, falling on one knee. "I have already got up again after three stabs from you ; I shall never rise after this fourth."

"Count !" said D'Artagnan, with some degree of emotion, "I struck without knowing that it was you. I am sorry, if you die, that you should die with sentiments of hatred toward me."

Rochefort extended his hand to D'Artagnan, who took it. The count wished to speak, but a gush of blood stifled him. He stiffened in the last convulsions of death and expired.

"Back, people !" cried D'Artagnan, "your leader is dead ; you have no longer any business here."

Indeed, as if De Rochefort had been the very soul of the attack, the crowd who had followed and obeyed him took to flight on seeing him fall. D'Artagnan charged, with a party of musketeers, up the Rue du Coq, and the portion of the mob he assailed disappeared like smoke, dispersing near the Place Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois and taking the direction of the quays.

D'Artagnan returned to help Porthos, if Porthos needed

help; but Porthos, for his part, had done his work as conscientiously as D'Artagnan. The left of the carriage was as well cleared as the right, and they drew up the blind of the window which Mazarin, less heroic than the king, had taken the precaution to lower.

Porthos looked very melancholy.

"What a devil of a face you have, Porthos! and what a strange air for a victor!"

"But you," answered Porthos, "seem to me agitated."

"There's a reason! Zounds! I have just killed an old friend."

"Indeed!" replied Porthos; "who?"

"That poor Count de Rochefort."

"Well! exactly like me! I have just killed a man whose face is not unknown to me. Unluckily, I hit him on the head and immediately his face was covered with blood."

"And he said nothing as he died?"

"Yes; he exclaimed, 'Oh!'"

"I suppose," answered D'Artagnan, laughing, "if he only said that, it did not enlighten you much."

"Well, sir!" cried the queen.

"Madame, the passage is quite clear and your majesty can continue your road."

In fact, the procession arrived in safety at Notre Dame, at the front gate of which all the clergy, with the coadjutor at their head, awaited the king, the queen and the minister, for whose happy return they chanted a *Te Deum*.

As the service was drawing to a close a boy entered the church in great excitement, ran to the sacristy, dressed himself quickly in the choir robes, and cleaving, thanks to that uniform, the crowd that filled the temple, approached Bazin, who, clad in his blue robe, was standing gravely in his place at the entrance to the choir.

Bazin felt some one pulling his sleeve. He lowered to earth his eyes, beatifically raised to Heaven, and recognized Friquet.

"Well, you rascal, what is it? How do you dare to disturb me in the exercise of my functions?" asked the beadle.

"Monsieur Bazin," said Friquet, "Monsieur Maillard — you know who he is; he gives holy water at Saint Eustache —"

"Well, go on."

"Well, he received in the scrimmage a sword stroke on the head. That great giant who was there gave it to him."

"In that case," said Bazin, "he must be pretty sick."

"So sick that he is dying, and he wants to confess to the coadjutor, who, they say, has power to remit great sins."

"And does he imagine that the coadjutor will put himself out for him?"

"To be sure; the coadjutor has promised."

"Who told you that?"

"Monsieur Maillard himself."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Certainly; I was there when he fell."

"What were you doing there?"

"I was shouting, 'Down with Mazarin!' 'Death to the cardinal!' 'The Italian to the gallows!' Isn't that what you would have me shout?"

"Be quiet, you rascal!" said Bazin, looking uneasily around.

"So that he told me, that poor Monsieur Maillard, 'Go find the coadjutor, Friquet, and if you bring him to me you shall be my heir.' Say, then, Father Bazin—the heir of Monsieur Maillard, the giver of holy water at Saint Eustache! Hey! I shall have nothing to do but to fold my arms! All the same, I should like to do him that service—what do you say to it?"

"I will tell the coadjutor," said Bazin.

In fact, he slowly and respectfully approached the prelate and spoke to him privately a few words, to which the latter responded by an affirmative sign. He then returned with the same slow step and said:

"Go and tell the dying man that he must be patient. Monseigneur will be with him in an hour."

"Good!" said Friquet, "my fortune is made."

"By the way," said Bazin, "where was he carried?"

"To the tower Saint Jacques la Boucherie;" and delighted with the success of his embassy, Friquet started off at the top of his speed.

When the *Te Deum* was over, the coadjutor, without stopping to change his priestly dress, took his way toward that old tower which he knew so well. He arrived in time. Though sinking from moment to moment, the wounded man was not yet dead. The door was opened to the coadjutor of the room in which the mendicant was suffering.

A moment later Friquet went out, carrying in his hand a large leather bag; he opened it as soon as he was outside the chamber and to his great astonishment found it full of gold. The mendicant had kept his word and made Friquet his heir.

"Ah! Mother Nanette!" cried Friquet, suffocating; "ah! Mother Nanette!"

He could say no more; but though he hadn't strength to speak he had enough for action. He rushed headlong to the street, and like the Greek from Marathon who fell in the square at Athens, with his laurel in his hand, Friquet reached Councillor Broussel's threshold, and then fell exhausted, scattering on the floor the louis disgorged by his leather bag.

Mother Nanette began by picking up the louis; then she picked up Friquet.

In the meantime the cortège returned to the Palais Royal.

"That Monsieur d'Artagnan is a very brave man, mother," said the young king.

"Yes, my son; and he rendered very important services to your father. Treat him kindly, therefore, in the future."

"Captain," said the young king to D'Artagnan, on descending from the carriage, "the queen has charged me to invite you to dinner to-day — you and your friend the Baron du Vallon."

That was a great honor for D'Artagnan and for Porthos. Porthos was delighted; and yet during the entire repast he seemed to be preoccupied.

"What was the matter with you, baron?" D'Artagnan said to him as they descended the staircase of the Palais Royal. "You seemed at dinner to be anxious about something."

"I was trying," said Porthos, "to recall where I had seen that mendicant whom I must have killed."

"And you couldn't remember?"

"No."

"Well, search, my friend, search; and when you have found, you will tell me, will you not?"

"*Pardieu!*" said Porthos.

CHAPTER XC.

CONCLUSION.

ON going home, the two friends found a letter from Athos, who desired them to meet him at the Grand Charlemagne on the following day.

The friends went to bed early, but neither of them slept. When we arrive at the summit of our wishes, success has usually the power to drive away sleep on the first night after the fulfillment of long cherished hopes.

The next day at the appointed hour they went to see Athos and found him and Aramis in traveling costume.

"What!" cried Porthos, "are we all going away, then? I, also, have made my preparations this morning."

"Oh, heavens! yes," said Aramis. "There's nothing to do in Paris now there's no Fronde. The Duchess de Longueville has invited me to pass a few days in Normandy, and has deputed me, while her son is being baptized, to go and prepare her residence at Rouen; after which, if nothing new occurs, I shall go and bury myself in my convent at Noisy-le-Sec."

"And I," said Athos, "am returning to Bragelonne. You know, dear D'Artagnan, I am nothing more than a good honest country gentleman. Raoul has no fortune other than I possess, poor child! and I must take care of it for him, since I only lend him my name."

"And Raoul — what shall you do with him?"

"I leave him with *you*, my friend. War has broken out in Flanders. You shall take him with you there. I am afraid that remaining at Blois would be dangerous to his youthful mind. Take him and teach him to be as brave and loyal as you are yourself."

"Then," replied D'Artagnan, "though I shall not have *you*, Athos, at all events I shall have that dear fair-haired head by me; and though he's but a boy, yet, since your soul lives again in him, dear Athos, I shall always fancy that you are near me, sustaining and encouraging me."

The four friends embraced with tears in their eyes.

Then they departed, without knowing whether they would ever see each other again.

D'Artagnan returned to the Rue Tiquetonne with Porthos, still possessed by the wish to find out who the man was that he had killed. On arriving at the Hôtel de la Chevrette they found the baron's equipage all ready and Musqueton on his saddle.

"Come, D'Artagnan," said Porthos, "bid adieu to your sword and go with me to Pierrefonds, to Bracieux, or to Du Vallon. We will grow old together and talk of our companions."

"No!" replied D'Artagnan, "deuce take it, the campaign is going to begin; I wish to be there, I expect to get something by it."

"What do you expect to get?"

"Why, I expect to be made Maréchal of France!"

"Ha! ha!" cried Porthos, who was not completely taken in by D'Artagnan's Gasconades.

"Come, my brother, go with me," added D'Artagnan, "and I will see that you are made a duke!"

"No," answered Porthos, "Mouston has no desire to fight; besides, they have erected a triumphal arch for me to enter my barony, which will kill my neighbors with envy."

"To that I can say nothing," returned D'Artagnan, who knew the vanity of the new baron. "Then, here's to our next merry meeting!"

"Adieu, dear captain," said Porthos, "I shall always be happy to welcome you to my barony."

"Yes, yes, when the campaign is over," replied the Gascon.

"His honor's equipage is waiting," said Musqueton.

The two friends, after a cordial pressure of the hands, separated. D'Artagnan was standing at the door looking after Porthos with a mournful gaze, when the baron, after walking scarcely more than twenty paces, returned — stood still — struck his forehead with his finger and exclaimed :

“ I recollect ! ”

“ What ? ” inquired D'Artagnan.

“ Who the beggar was that I killed.”

“ Ah ! indeed ! and who was he ? ”

“ 'Twas that low fellow, Bonancieux.”

And Porthos, enchanted at having relieved his mind, rejoined Musqueton and they disappeared around an angle of the street. D'Artagnan stood for an instant, mute, pensive and motionless ; then, as he went in, he saw the fair Madeleine, his hostess, standing on the threshold.

“ Madeleine,” said the Gascon, “ give me your apartment on the first floor ; now that I am a captain in the royal musketeers I must make an appearance ; nevertheless, reserve my old room on the fifth story for me ; one never knows what may happen.”

THE END.

